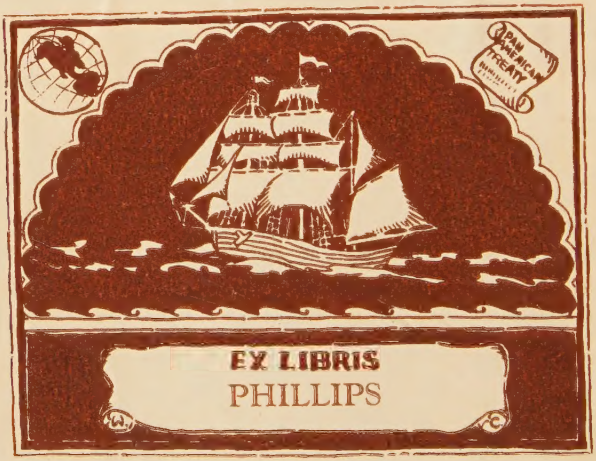
ZELDA MARSH

CHARLES G. NORRIS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ZELDA MARSH

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

SALT

OR THE EDUCATION OF GRIFFITH ADAMS

"Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?"

—MATTHEW V:13

BRASS

A NOVEL OF MARRIAGE

"Annul a marriage? 'Tis impossible!
Though ring around your neck be brass, not gold,
Needs must it clasp, gangrene you all the same!"

—ROBERT BROWNING

BREAD

A NOVEL CONCERNING WORK AND WOMEN

"Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not?"

ISAIAH lv:2

PIG IRON

A NOVEL OF SUCCESS

"Pig Iron: A casting run directly from the smelting furnace into trough-like molds."—WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY.

ZELDA MARSH

by CHARLES G. NORRIS

Author of
BRASS, PIG-IRON
etc.

Virtue's but a word,
Fortune rules all.
—Philip Massinger

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BOOK I

ZELDA MARSH

CHAPTER I

§ 1

The wet fog slowly billowed up Sacramento Street. It was nearing five o'clock on a Sunday afternoon. With the fading daylight, the scene from the dining room window from which Zelda Marsh gazed was dreary and forlorn. For an hour or two she had been trying to study her school work for the morrow, but she hated school, and hated studying. She was seventeen, in her middle year at the Lowell High School, and was rated as one of the poorer scholars for she was inattentive, usually in trouble, and her home work was persistently neglected. Recently she had promised her uncle and Mr. Horton, the school principal, to do better, and on this particular Sunday afternoon she had honestly made an effort, but it was of little use. She rebelled at lessons. She could not concentrate because she had never learned how.

Now she welcomed the lessening daylight as an excuse to fling her battered Virgil to the other end of the couch and kneel where she had been sitting to gaze at the dripping eucalyptus trees in the Godfreys' yard. The Godfreys lived next door in an imposing double white house surrounded by a lawn in which stone stags and other animals stood in alert attitudes. Their residence was far more imposing than the Burgesses', but

Uncle Caleb's house was by no means insignificant, and Zelda had thought it a very grand place indeed when Aunt Mary had brought her to it from Bakersfield two years before. The house was a two-story, brown affair of frame construction, as was nearly every residence in San Francisco during the early nineties, with a mansard roof capped with ornamental grille work, and a pair of columns supporting a sort of portico over the main entrance. It had a sizable and rather pretty garden as well.

The garden was Zelda's special delight. There was the back garden and the side garden, and on the opposite side of the house a region known as "the stone yard" with a paved alley connecting it with the street. The back garden contained a good-sized lawn with a concrete walk bordering it, a hothouse in one corner, a rockaway in the centre over which nasturtiums clambered in profusion and a giant willow in whose branches Zelda loved to hide herself with a book, often the kind that Aunt Mary forbade. The side garden was narrow and filled the space between the Burgess house and the Godfrey fence. Through it curved a concrete walk bordered with clumps of calla lilies and ferns, while against the walls of the house and opposing fence fuchsias bloomed, tacked to their supports with strips of old gloves. At the upper end was the goldfish pond where lived Zelda's pet turtles, Ruby and Hercules.

She could see one of these ungracious favorites on this dismal Sunday afternoon floating motionlessly, its sleek black head just above the water's surface. The fish pond was directly beneath the window and the thick ivy that covered the rocks and contiguous fence was shining wet with the drenching fog. The scraggly eucalyptus trees dripped intermittently. The girl wondered idly what it must be like to be a turtle, indifferent to all states of weather. To her, rain, fog, clouds, even gathering dusk, were profoundly depressing. Sunshine, golden, effulgent sunshine, alone heartened her; she could often tell in the early morning before fully awake

whether it was raining or the sun was shining merely from the state of her spirits.

Gloomily, she gazed forth upon the dreary scene before her and sighed. She hated Sunday. It was always the day-out of one or the other servant. Hong, the Chinese cook, waited clumsily on the table, while Nora, the maid, who had been with the Burgesses, Heaven knew how long, never prepared anything appetizingly. An air of repression and depression pervaded the entire house on Sunday. It was so more or less on any day of the week but on Sundays it often became intolerable. Uncle Caleb was at home all day on Sundays and in the afternoon Doctor Boylston always came to play chess with him, and the rooms reeked of their cigar smoke. Zelda could hear the two men arguing in the "back parlor" over the game they had just finished as they arranged the pieces for a new one. Doctor Boylston usually stayed for Sunday supper so that he and Uncle Caleb could continue their chess playing until nearly midnight. And on Sunday afternoons Aunt Mary invariably "lay down," which meant that upstairs there must be no noise.

Zelda sighed again and flounced back into the seat on which she had been kneeling. Nora entered and began to insert leaves in the dining room table, and Zelda watched her with a dark frown and lips puckered together like the closed mouth of a draw string bag. Even so, she was pretty. Zelda had always been pretty. It was not so much in her features that her comeliness lay as in her coloring and the vivaciousness of her expression. She had tawny masses of hair which she wore in a "club" at the back of her neck,—a style of the day,—and it curled in graceful tendrils at her temples. In sharp contrast to the muddy yellow mane were her black brows and black lashes, and the warm bloom of her cheeks. Her face constantly expressed her emotions. Quick changes chased one another across it with extraordinary rapidity. They were often subtle changes too, and not to be

read at a glance. With all her vivacity, Zelda could look inscrutable when she chose. She was in complete command of her expression and could register the finest shades of meaning. Of her charm and prettiness she was thoroughly aware, and almost from her tenth year she had been conscious of her appeal to the other sex. Boys were an important factor in Zelda's life; she could no more refrain from a flirtatious glance in their direction, now and then, than she could refrain from breathing. She was the type that commands admiration, and her admirers were by no means confined to boys of her own age or boys two or three years her senior. Men, grown-up, middle-aged, even grizzled-haired and bald-headed men, men quite old enough to be her father, followed her with frank stares, or betrayed with a sudden interest in their own, the effect of one of her lazy, idle glances.

§ 2

It had been partly on account of this very thing, that her father in Bakersfield, two years before, had written to his dead wife's sister about Zelda and begged that some more healthy atmosphere be found for her.

The early history of Joe Marsh had been that of an itinerant cook. Zelda dimly remembered days when she lived with him and her mother in a "chuck-car" hitched to a construction train of the U. P. Railroad. These had been happy, care-free, affluent years, as she recalled them when the Marsh family had fed on the fat of the land, when there had been always a generous supply of meat, great fat sides of beef and pork to dismember and broil, roast or stew, and a constant, ever-changing supply of fruit and green vegetables as the construction train moved from place to place. The days had been full of prairie beauty, of blazing, terrifying sunsets and star-spangled black nights whose stillness was broken only by the distant yapping of coyotes. They had been days too when a sweet-faced, soft-cheeked woman had

cradled Zelda in her arms and the caresses and the affection, the child had craved ever since, had been lavishly bestowed. Zelda often wondered about that sweet-faced, soft-cheeked, shadowy figure, and what became of her. One day when the little girl had been staying for several weeks with a station agent's family at a lonely spot somewhere in that stretch of prairie beauty, it came upon her dimly that her mother had died,—but how or when she was never told.

Following this bereavement, whose significance meant but little to her childish imagination, Zelda remained with the station agent, his wife and small daughter for over a year, and the period lasted in her memory not by reason of her intimacy with Betty, the agent's freckled-faced little daughter, who was her own age, but on account of a certain white, woolly lamb, who in some curious fashion had acquired the name of Nimrod. In her eighteenth year Zelda could truthfully say that the most intense emotion she had ever known was her love for the stumbling, clumsy, nosing little Nimrod. When her father suddenly appeared from nowhere to take her away with him, she experienced a grief at the parting that still shook her in remembrance. Nimrod was gone; she had left him poking his puzzled little face through the rough boards of his pen, gazing after her in troubled fashion with his pink-rimmed dark eyes.

There followed experiences in various boarding-houses of San Francisco. For a time Joe Marsh was cook in the galley of a Sacramento River boat, and every third day he would materialize, occasionally taking his small daughter to the Park during his hours of freedom ashore.

Then one day in her tenth year, her father hitched his fortunes to a travelling circus and took her with him. He presided over a sandwich and hamburg steak concession, and again his kitchen travelled on wheels. Happy, exciting days! Bustle and hurry and preparation, the sweating circus crew bending their backs to

ropes and tackles, the great tent miraculously rearing its poles and spreading its canvas; the snorting, grunting animals, smelling of stables, meat and hair, dragged in their cages to their stations, the gathering crowds, the inevitable fleet of small boys, and barkers, and the ballyhooing, her father shouting his wares as the mob filed into the tent, and later in a chef's cap and apron peddling his tissue-paper-wrapped sandwiches up and down the aisles of the bleachers within the enclosure.

An experience all too short for Zelda. The circus had failed; there had been a fire, a mad night of leaping flames, panic and wild screaming of the animals, and four of the prize exhibits had to be shot with a rifle at long range. The show had broken up; Bakersfield and the Gastronomic Hotel had followed.

§ 3

Life, as she knew it, Zelda learned in Bakersfield. The "chuck-car," the prairie station agent's family, Nimrod, the 'Frisco boarding-houses, the months with the circus, were for her but a series of preludes to the real business of living. When in retrospect she thought of her life, her mind went no farther back than the Gastronomic Hotel. Some other entity had lived through the vicissitudes of her earlier years. The ramshackle building in which her father maintained his precarious business, Matea Gonzales, old man Trent, who lived on the second floor and had been there from the day the hotel opened its doors, Rags, the curly-headed dog who belonged to the Scotch carpenter next door, Miss Sweet, her teacher, and various boys and girls who were her school companions, all these seemed to constitute for Zelda the only life she had ever known.

The Gastronomic Hotel was a two-story hostelry situated on one of the side streets of Bakersfield. Gaudy beer signs and beer shields hung on the walls of the dining room and from the centre cluster of kerosene

lamps were strung festoons of colored paper whose purpose was to attract flies.

Joe Marsh presided in the kitchen during the preparation of each meal, then established himself on a tall stool behind the counter of the bar, whence, with a toothpick in a corner of his mouth, he surveyed his few, intermittent patrons and overlooked the work of Zelda and Matea.

Joe Marsh's pretty daughter, and she commenced to be thought pretty even in her twelfth year, could not have said when first she began to suspect the nature of her father's relations with the rather plump, affable Mexican woman. Zelda liked Matea Gonzales and the dark-skinned woman was fond of the girl. Long before the child understood a jeering, significant remark dropped in her presence, she knew that Matea and her father slept together. But Zelda accepted the fact without question, accepted it much as she had accepted her mother's existence, her father's, and the relationship between them before the former died. Matea was kind, was warm-hearted and affectionate, and as Joe Marsh said, "worked like a horse." She arose at five every morning, started a fire in the stove, took down the shutters, swept kitchen and dining room, attended to a thousand and one things that needed attention, allowing the man who was neither wholly employer nor husband, but who stood in his relations with her as both, to sleep until a more reasonable hour, and at his pleasure descend to his day's duties.

Existence had been a lazy, happy-go-lucky life in Bakersfield. It was years before the oil boom. The interest of the community had been in flocks and herds and in the desert mines of Goler and the Yellow Aster at Randsburg. There was always a prospector or two stopping at Joe Marsh's Hotel to outfit himself before striking into the hills, and there were occasional rangers and cattlemen who stayed there over night. Old man Trent was the only steady boarder, a silent, shabby

little person who came and went, sucking a blackened corn-cob pipe, and who paid nothing for either food or lodging. Zelda never learned the reason why her father befriended him, but the result of that charity was to have an important bearing in shaping her own destiny. Now and then a lucky miner would return to the town with tales of a "strike" and a bag full of small nuggets to prove it, and there would be feasting and rioting, reckless gambling in the larger saloons, the thump and bang of banjos from the dance halls, and shrill squeals and ribald laughter from the region known as "Spanish town," a district hardly more than a good stone's throw from the very centre of such respectability as Bakersfield boasted. Zelda knew all about "Spanish town"; she knew some of its inmates by sight, and "Big Bertha," a fat and waddling procuress who ran the largest and most profligate dive of all, was a familiar figure on the main streets.

Matea, observing the child's budding beauty, often talked to her, and, at Zelda's pert and airy answers, shook a troubled head. Joe Marsh growled his admonitions. It was obvious in what direction Zelda's disposition had a tendency to lead her. She abounded with vitality, was eager, even at so undeveloped an age, for excitement, adventure, and men eyed her with admiration and speculative appraising glances. While not yet fifteen, she could stand, hand on hip, bestow a provoking, significant look from under her dark lashes upon a man's face, twist a smiling lip and make answer to his insinuating, friendly overtures with all the manner of a woman twice her age. Zelda knew what she was about. "Spanish town" did not attract her; men did, or, to be more accurate, the power she exercised over them amused her.

Then abruptly came a time when into this quiet, more or less humdrum manner of living, events followed one another with staggering rapidity and disturbed Zelda's world, changing the entire order of her existence. Old

man Trent, one morning, was found dead in his bed. Among his effects a photograph of Zelda's father came to light across the face of which was written in Trent's uncertain hand, "I leave all to him," and beneath, the dead man's signature. Old Trent had nothing to bequeath and the photograph with the inscription was carelessly tossed into a table drawer; but within six months inquiries for Joe Marsh's erstwhile guest were made at the County Recorder's office. Years before, it appeared, Trent had filed homestead rights on a parcel of one hundred and sixty acres near Whiskey Flat; the claim had apparently been worthless, but outcroppings of gold had suddenly been discovered there by a wandering prospector.

The faded old photograph of Joe Marsh with Trent's inscription on it was hastily rescued, was adjudged a proper, legal testament, was admitted to probate, and Zelda's father, after protracted squabbling and bargaining, agreed to accept a cash payment of ten thousand dollars for his right and title to old Trent's abandoned homestead. Later the same one hundred and sixty acres were to be worth a thousand times as much, but it was oil, not gold, that was found beneath its barren, sandy surface.

And swift upon the heels of this good fortune came calamity, to even matters. The hot fires, before which Joe Marsh had cooked for half his life, claimed their penalty; the proprietor of the Gastronomic Hotel would within a year or two, so the doctors said, lose his sight, his eyes were burnt out. Rest, care, darkness for twenty hours out of every twenty-four, might give him partial vision for some time to come,—the future alone would show. He must abandon his enterprise immediately, and devote himself to preserving what little sight remained.

Zelda had never heard of her mother's sister; she had not supposed she had any relatives. One day, Aunt Mary Burgess drove in a station hack up to the doors

of her brother-in-law's ramshackle hostelry. Joe Marsh had written her in desperation. Some provision must be made for Zelda; her father, facing blindness, would either sell out his interest in the hotel or close its doors. From the sale of the Trent homestead tract and from what he had saved, he had money enough to provide for himself for the rest of his days and he had five thousand dollars to contribute to his daughter's maintenance and education until she came of age.

"Tell you, Mary," Joe had assured his wife's sister, "the girl's a fine girl, she's got stuff in her and she'll go far 'fore she's through, but, by dun, I can't hold her. She's like a colt rarin' to go. But you—you could do it. You could give her somethin' she's set on, and she'd work for it and she'd work to please you. You got a home and servants and a nice place and Zelda would fancy all that. 'Deed she would. Bakersfield's got nothing to offer her except that bunch of hookers over there in Spanish town—and she'll be one of 'em sooner or later if you don't take her out o' here. You know, Carrie was a fine woman, Mary; you was mighty fond of Carrie."

Zelda was helping Matea in the kitchen when they sent for her. Her first impression of Aunt Mary was of a person whom she would have described as a "gran-n-nd lady," a "swell." Her mother's sister was sitting at one of the dining tables, chair pushed well back, her father near at hand, talking earnestly. The woman was short and plump, with a full, round, prominent bosom, and tiny, well-shaped feet and hands. The former, on this particular day, were shod in high buttoned shoes that fitted her fat calves snugly; the latter were cased in long black kid gloves that wrinkled in soft folds to her elbow. Upon her head poised a jet-tipped bonnet from beneath which several inches of tight brown curls were pressed flat against her forehead by a closely-drawn veil. She had crossed her wrists beneath the bulge of her bosom, and with pinched lips now sur-

veyed her niece without comment. Zelda stood before her, alertly conscious of something unusual, and gazed with growing confusion from the strange lady to her father, then back again. The confusion sprang partly from a feeling of her own shabbiness, dirtiness, and untidiness; the apron she wore was grease-stained and torn; her sleeves were rolled back to the crooks of her arms, her hands and forearms reeked with the smell of potato parings. Of how pretty, charming and domestic she appeared at the moment, she had no idea. Her tawny hair, loosened and dishevelled, framed her face in an aureole of soft light, like a golden plaque behind a saint's head. Her eyes were wide with questioning wonder, eyebrows and eyelashes vivid black; the warm blood in her cheeks deepened with concern and embarrassment.

"Zelda—this is your mother's sister—your Aunt Mary Burgess," her father had announced. Zelda could only stare, her troubled frown increasing.

"My dear—" said Aunt Mary, and held out her arms.

Zelda liked her kiss and the feel of her cold, crisp cheek against her own lips.

§ 4

Thus Zelda and Aunt Mary met, and it is doubtful if they ever grew to know each other better, or to like each other half so well.

Zelda's aunt was Caleb Burgess's second wife. He had married her late in life after her predecessor had been dead ten years. At the time of the wedding Aunt Mary was thirty, he past fifty, and when Zelda came to live with them, they had been married fifteen years.

Caleb Burgess was a tall, heavy, taciturn individual with a black beard that covered the lower part of his face and hung square from his chin like a Mormon

elder's. In every sense he was lord and master of his house. He ruled it arbitrarily and inspired every one in it with a feeling little short of abject fear. He rarely smiled, spoke hardly more often, but an infrequent command was rigidly obeyed. The daily regime observed by the household was as Uncle Caleb wished it, the meals were ordered and prepared as he desired, the hours of rising and retiring were of his selection. He came and went, silently, ponderously.

The home on Sacramento Street was a rich man's house in the opinion of the day. The garden, the two-storied elevation, the mansard roof, the bay windows, the ornamental scrolls of mill work that constituted the cornices, the iron grille that topped the roof, the awninged entrance, the stone carriage step at the curb, these were evidences of affluent respectability. The exterior of the house was not unprepossessing, but within an atmosphere of gloom prevailed. Dark wall-papers, crimson lambrequins, large black-framed mirrors, somber pictures, statuettes of crusaders in armor, tall cases of books, tufted upholstery, heavy chenille curtains at doors and windows, all contributed to the oppressive air.

Only in the matter of her ferns and potted plants did Aunt Mary appear to have any opportunity to express herself. In the bay window of the "library" was a large wire stand, a semi-circular affair designed to hold flower pots, in three tiers graduating toward the top. Aunt Mary had the gardener bring in the pots from the greenhouse every day or two. They held begonias and maiden-hair, feathery asparagus, trailing smilax, mignonette, forget-me-not, and occasionally a rose-bush. The embrasure of the window contained the only life, the only note of freshness within the house.

But Zelda was far from unhappy in this meticulously regulated, depressing atmosphere; she was too full of high spirits for it to affect her. She had learned quickly how to escape from it and she had her own "refuges."

She was thinking about some of these on this particular Sunday afternoon as she watched Nora setting the table for supper. At the moment Zelda was depressed, but this was due to the weather and not to the gloom of the house. One of her lairs, retreats, hiding-places, dens, asylums,—it depended upon her mood how she thought of them,—was first of all her own room. This was upstairs, in the rear, and was airy, spacious, a delightful sanctum. Zelda loved her room. There were windows, one that overlooked the Godfreys' back yard, in which often she could observe Peter Godfrey, the young son of the house, washing, or playing with his white fox terrier; the other presented a view of the Burgesses' own back garden. Below this window was the roof of the laundry and the room in which Hong slept.

Another shelter wherein she frequently secreted herself was the attic, reached by a tall, perpendicular ladder in the bath room next her bed chamber. A heavy lid or trap door gave access to this particular retreat, and a memorable day it had been when she discovered that by putting her back against it and heaving with all her might, climbing the last rungs of the ladder at the same time, she had the strength to lift the door and tip it upright against the wall above.

Next came the cellar, dark and dirty with ash dust from the furnace, and coal dust from the bins, but there was a hiding place in the unused wine closet which she had carefully swept and fitted up with discarded broken furniture dragged down from the attic. Besides the wine closet, the cellar held still another place of concealment. This was reached by a trap door behind the furnace from which one could enter the unexcavated regions under the house, to be explored only on hands and knees,—an untenantable place of sand, broken bricks and rubbish.

And not to be omitted from this list was the greenhouse in the garden, by no means hers exclusively, but

a spot where frequently she could count on being undisturbed. Lastly there were the branches of the willow tree.

Upon her idle consideration of these hiding places, there came the distant sound of a whistle, a neat waver of notes up and down the scale. Instantly Zelda woke to life. The thin sound was electrifying. Every muscle in her body sprang taut and with a sharp, almost painful torsion she sat erect on the edge of the sofa, alert and listening.

The whistle was one she knew well. It was employed by a certain group of young men who lived in the neighborhood, youths a year or two older than Zelda, of a distinctly different class from the boys she met at high school. For the most part, these young men belonged to families of some social prominence, families with money and recognized position. Zelda knew most of them. She met them occasionally on her way to school and was always pleased by the man-of-the-world way in which they lifted their hats to her. She knew they followed her with their eyes and talked of her among themselves. They were a gay crowd of youths in general, a trifle inclined to recklessness, a bit extravagant in dress, careless of money. They fascinated her, although she looked at them askance.

She listened for a repetition of the whistle, wondering if it was meant for her. She had been fooled on more than one occasion when the signal had been for Peter Godfrey who was older but who was intimate with all this gang of young bloods. If for her,—the thought flashed through her mind,—it might be Michael Kirk, but she knew it would not be Michael, because Michael did not belong to this sporting group, and Michael was not the kind to stand in front of a girl's house and whistle for her.

Clear and thrilling came the quaver of notes again. Instantly Zelda was on her feet, flashed into the hall and sped its length swiftly and silently. At the front

door she peered through the transparent design in the frosted panel; she could make out a figure on the sidewalk, one foot idly elevated to the low coping of the garden wall, while the backward-tilted head indicated its owner scanned the windows of the house's upper story. She did not wait for better identification. Enough that it was for her he whistled, and the imprudent Romeo might bring her resentful aunt to the window with his persistent call. Zelda twisted the knobs of the heavy door and looked forth. It was Gerald Page. He wore a long rain-coat and the brim of his felt hat was turned down and dripped water.

"Hello!"

Zelda laid a warning finger on her lips. The boy came up the steps and she met him by slipping out into the entry, her hand on the door knob, the door itself closed to a crack behind her.

"Hello, Zelda!"

"What d'you want?" They grinned at one another, and their eyes shining.

"Say—want to go drivin' in the Park early tomorrow morning?"

"Oh, I guess not."

"Say, listen, Father's coachman's sick and Bella and Bonnie've got to be exercised. I'm taking 'em out at six; I'll have you back by eight."

"They won't let me."

"Sure they will; go on and ask 'em."

"It isn't any good, Gerry; I tell you they won't let me."

"But, gosh, *why* won't they?"

"Well-l, it's Monday, and I have to make an early start for school, and I just know Auntie'll say 'no.' "

"Will you go some time with me, then?"

Zelda flushed.

"Of course; I'd love to."

"How about next Sunday?"

"You'll have to ask my aunt."

"That will be all right. When can I see her?"

"Oh, dear, I don't know. You'll have to chance it some afternoon. They won't let me have anybody call in the evenings on school days."

"I can see your aunt, can't I, if I come over? She won't refuse to see me if I just drop in some night."

"You might run into Uncle."

"Well, gosh, I'm not afraid of your uncle!"

Zelda laughed. Her flush, her excitement made her radiant.

"Gee, you're pretty, Zelda!" The young man studied her with frank admiration.

"Oh, hush! You're an old flatterer, you say that to every girl you know."

"Honest, I don't."

They fell to bantering, murmuring trivialities.

"Say, you going to the Theta Chi dance at Golden Gate Hall?"

"Guess not. I haven't been asked and I don't think my aunt——"

"Oh, hang your aunt! . . . I don't mean anything disrespectful, Zelda, but there's no sense in keeping you shut up in a cage. Gee, the dance is going to be swell. Will you go if I get you a bid?"

More playful argument, Zelda restive under the feeling that it was getting close to supper-time and that she was running the risk of being caught at this unbecoming intercourse, yet unwilling to send away so delightful a young man, who might take her driving next Sunday, and to the Theta Chi dance. Not that there was any chance of her aunt's consenting to either.

"You're much too young, my dear. Your uncle wouldn't approve. There's plenty of time for that by and by."

Zelda could hear her saying it.

"Pete Godfrey's going on a camping trip up to Lake Elinor and over into the Hetch Hetchy. Gee, I'd like to be able to go along."

Zelda wondered what prevented him. He appeared to be an intimate friend of her neighbor.

"I'm going to Harvard next year," he stated as though he guessed her thoughts. "I'm tutoring like the deuce now, you know; the governor's making me."

She wished he would leave. She knew he wanted to kiss her but not for a moment did she intend to let him. Instinctively, she undertsood the value of not cheapening herself. She had no favors to give. His wet hat was rolled under his arm, his curly fair hair, the most attractive feature he possessed, rippled in tight waves above his forehead. His eyes were blue and had a dancing light in them, but he had a weak chin and there was always an offending bubble of moisture in the corners of his mouth when he talked.

"I've got to go in."

"Aw, don't go yet."

"I have to."

"Can you meet me later?"

"No, certainly not."

"Aw, come on."

The girl straightened imperceptibly.

"Good night," she said with some coldness and stepped back through the door.

"Zelda . . ."

She peeked at him through a chink.

"See you Sunday—*maybe*," she whispered.

She gave him a last flash of eyes and a glittering smile. The supper bell rang silvery. She closed the door without noise, slipped into the library and followed her uncle and Doctor Boylston into the dining room.

§ 5

As usual there was a round dish of browned baked beans for supper. It was the rule for Sunday when Hong was out,—baked beans, tea and toast, with a cold pudding. Aunt Mary came downstairs with the warm

flush of sleep still on her face, winking exaggeratedly and suppressing half yawns with deprecatory fingers. The frizz of brown curls across her forehead was slightly dishevelled. Zelda knew she had half a dozen of these "false fronts" which she kept pinned on cardboard forms when not in use. Once a week she took three or four of them to Strazinski, the hairdresser, to be dressed and curled. To-night she ensconced herself at one end of the table and promptly began to busy herself with the tea things. Her silent, black-bearded husband seated himself opposite, Doctor Boylston, at the side, faced Zelda.

On the whole the girl liked the physician. First because he was handsome; second, because she knew he liked her. He had a ruddy, fresh skin, was of large build, with twinkling, pleasant eyes, that winked behind glasses attached by a fine gold chain to a guard over his ear. He was about forty, had a fair practice, and lived the year round at the California Hotel on Bush Street. Once, about a year ago when Zelda had been confined to bed with a cold, he had called twice to see her, and on the second occasion when they were alone for a little while, Doctor Boylston had kissed her arm and patted it affectionately. Zelda remembered it and she knew the physician did, too. He smiled whenever he spoke to her or caught her eye, a friendly, amused, agreeable smile. He was not afraid to laugh in the dark, gloomy house; sometimes he laughed uproariously, and the girl suspected that these noisy outbursts were often at her uncle's and aunt's expense, or for her own particular edification.

"How's my California poppy?" he said now, catching sight of her as she entered the dining room. He put his arm about her shoulders and drew her against him in a playful hug. Zelda felt curiously small whenever she came in proximity with the doctor; he was a large man in frame and chest, big-limbed, almost as tall as Uncle Caleb.

They sat down and commenced to eat.

"Your favorite beans, Doctor. I declare we've formed the habit of having them now since you've got us into the way of liking them so much. You take two lumps if I remember rightly?"

"I still maintain I forced you to castle. There was no other way out."

"There were others, two or three; I had them in mind at the time."

"You can't name one!"

"Nora, the biscuits."

"Auntie, do you know the Pages?"

"You lost the game when you exchanged that bishop for my knight."

A chess argument between the men. Zelda's mind wandered; she was thinking about the Theta Chi dance. When her thoughts came back to the conversation, the doctor was telling a story about one of his patients. Disinterestedly she listened. He finished with a burst of laughter and swept her into mirth with his infectious guffaw. Nora went about the table with a napkin ineffectually whisking onto a plate the crumbs that littered the cloth; most of them fell on the carpet. Zelda observed her aunt watching her with steady, disapproving eyes. The cold pudding appeared. Presently Uncle Caleb began his table ablutions with a tip of his napkin moistened in his drinking tumbler. He pushed back his chair, feeling in his upper vest pocket for cigars. One of these he pushed across toward his guest. Then, without having once addressed either wife or niece, he rose and moved with heavy, deliberate step into the adjoining room where, with his fuming cigar in the very centre of his mouth, his hands locked behind his back, he stood studying the unfinished game on the chess board. Doctor Boylston continued chatting with Mrs. Burgess and Zelda. Aunt Mary listened with what appeared intelligent interest, her gray eyes upon the speaker's face, but Zelda knew she understood little of what he was say-

ing. It was a relief when Doctor Boylston reached for a match to light his cigar and Aunt Mary rose.

"I'll say good night, then, Doctor, and leave you and Caleb to finish your game; come, Zelda, I'm sure you have some studying to do."

"I'll get my books, Auntie."

Mrs. Burgess, with the skirt of her trailing blue tea-gown pinched between thumb and finger of either hand and elevated high enough to prevent her tripping, proceeded upstairs.

Doctor Boylston put his hand over Zelda's, and drew her toward him.

"You're my California poppy," he said, squinting at her through the smoke of his cigar.

She laughed and dragged at her hand.

"Oh, Doctor," she protested.

He eyed her, her hand imprisoned in his.

"You know, my dear, you're going to be a very beautiful, a very seductive woman."

She gave him the benefit of one of her amused, tolerant glances, the kind she used to bestow on the occasional miner or cattleman who drifted into her father's hotel and tried to flirt with her,—a glance from under half-closed lids, with arched and elevated brows, hand on hip, a bit of swaggering insolence in the pose.

The light of banter faded from the doctor's face.

"Zelda," she said gravely, "you're going to be a wonderful woman and you're going to have a wonderful life—but you haven't a soul yet and you're going to know a good deal of suffering before you find one."

She shrugged, drawing down the corners of her mouth.

"You might be a great actress some day, if you wanted to, but you'll have to learn how to feel first, and then how to express that feeling."

"You mean go on the stage?" she asked with interest.

He nodded.

"Will you go to the California Theatre with me some evening? You know I'm the house physician. I live right there. I'll take you any time."

The smirk, the pose dropped; the girl's eyes glowed with pleasure.

"Indeed I will. I love the theatre, and I'll love you to death if you'll take me, Doctor. I'm sure they'll let me go with *you!*"

His smile widened and he pressed her hand.

"You're a glorious child," he observed.

Impulsively, she leaned forward and pressed her lips to his forehead. Instantly, his free arm was around her; he caught her, drew her to him and kissed her warmly on the mouth. She struggled, pushing him from her. He was the first grown man who had ever kissed her in that way; there had been plenty of boys and youths, but this was the first man. His breath was warm and smelled strongly of his cigar. The contact, the rough seizure offended her. She recoiled, concealing her distaste.

"Say, Boylston, you coming in here to finish this game, or you going to sit out there all night?"

Uncle Caleb calling from the next room.

"Coming; coming right now, Caleb." Then, in a whisper to Zelda, "Will you go to the theatre with me this week? Saturday? Saturday matinée?"

"Ask Uncle," came the breathless answer. She snatched up her Virgil from the sofa where it had lain since the afternoon, and darted swiftly up the stairs.

§ 6

The night outside was black, and dense with fog. Zelda, in her frilled nightgown, knelt at the open window, her hands clasped on the sill. One might have supposed that she was saying her prayers, but she did not know one to say. With a single exception, when she had sidled with another little girl into a Catholic church in Bakersfield to steal a glimpse of a christening ceremony,

she had not set foot inside a place of worship in her life. Matea had occasionally mumbled something, crossing herself, and there was the faint memory in the dim past of that soft-cheeked mother folding her little girl's fingers together and making her repeat certain words. These were forgotten now. Zelda knew nothing of religion, nor of God. To-night, she was thinking only of the exciting events possibly held for her by the days immediately at hand. Adventures! Driving with Gerry Page in the Park, the Theta Chi dance, the theatre with Doctor Boylston. All life was trembling with adventure. She felt herself on the threshold of experiences, thrilling, tremendous experiences. She, Zelda Marsh. What had the world in store for Zelda Marsh? What had Zelda Marsh in store for the world? She sighed happily. Against the soft cushion of flesh made by her crooked elbow she laid her smooth cheek, resting it there contentedly.

CHAPTER II

§ 1

Michael Kirk lived with his mother in a little cottage across the street, a block and a half below the Burgess home. A corner grocery with a back bar adjoined it, and diagonally across stood a Chinese laundry. Mrs. Michael Kirk, his mother, was a music teacher, a very good one, and as an accompanist was in demand by all the great singers when they came to San Francisco. She was white-haired, strong-featured, capable, a thorough musician. The apple of her eye was her son, Michael. Her husband had died long ago; there were no other children.

Michael was sixteen and had left High School after his first year to study drawing and sculpture in a private art class. Michael's mother was bent upon having him express himself artistically and it was clear the boy had an inclination in that direction.

"Oh, Michael, Michael," she would say, "I do hope you can excel in some branch of the Arts. I'm so keenly anxious to have you find the task of earning your living a joy rather than a grind!"

"Yes, Mother," he would obediently agree. He always agreed with his mother, had done so since the days when she dressed him in Fauntleroy suits with lace collars and spent patient hours each night curling his sand-colored hair. Michael adored his mother.

He was a well-built boy for his age, but for some peculiar reason did not appear so. Although he was under the average height, it was his face rather than his inches that gave the impression he was not strong. It was a shy face, nervous, sensitive, given to quick

grinning, boyish and charming, and when his glistening white teeth flashed, his whole countenance wrinkled and his eyes shut to narrow slits of merriment. Everybody liked Michael. There was an appealing quality about him that captured people's fancy instantly. Moreover he was amiable and affectionate.

The cottage in which he and his mother lived was a small one of half a dozen rooms set back behind a white picket fence of round palings in a small garden of violets, calla lilies and geraniums. There was a patch of languishing lawn, "big as my pocket handkerchief," Mrs. Kirk used to describe it. She was devoted to her flowers. Michael did the watering every morning before breakfast and again after sundown, but Mrs. Kirk pruned, snipped and trowelled herself.

Out in the back yard was a separate building known as Michael's studio, a simple structure built with its back against the tall fence separating the Kirks' property from the adjoining corner grocery. It had a "lean-to" roof and no more elaborate foundation than four-by-four timbers laid parallel to one another and set flat upon the cement pavement of the yard. Its wooden flooring creaked and the building trembled to every heavy tread or jar. Michael spent most of his time out there, and had fixed up the place to his liking. With his own hands he had tacked burlap to the walls, and against it had placed magazine posters by Penfield, Maxfield Parrish and Joseph Pennell, alternating with his own charcoal studies. There were a couch, a table, chairs, and other odd pieces of furniture, besides an old green dining room table cover that served as a rug. The room was lit by a skylight in a tilting roof; Michael had insisted there should be no windows. A stack of small canvases stood in one corner, their faces to the wall, together with several large portfolios bulging with charcoal sketches. There were his easel and a life-sized lay figure that it pleased the young artist to dress up in the most outlandish fashion.

§ 2

"Michael-son, what do you know about this Burgess girl—Marsh's her right name, isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know, Mother; she used to be in my class up at Lowell. I've spoken to her once or twice I guess. . . . Ran into her at the drug store one day when I went after alcohol or something for you. Why . . .? What do you ask for?"

"I was just wondering. She seems a forward creature to me. Her people aren't much. I never did like that Mrs. Burgess."

There was a minute or two of silence in the kitchen while Mrs. Kirk with a long-handled fork fished for cutlery at the bottom of a dish pan, and Michael with the point of a knife scraped the inside of a burned enameled pot. Both mother and son were thinking what their next remark should be. Mrs. Kirk expressed herself first with a casual air that in nowise deceived her son.

"You see her now and then?"

"No."

"I thought I caught a glimpse of her sauntering by the house the other afternoon, looking at it—well, as though she were looking for you."

"I haven't seen nor spoken to her for—for months."

Scrape—scrape—scrape! Michael dug viciously at the encrusted utensil. It was the first time he had consciously lied to his mother,—the first time, oh, in years and years.

§ 3

It was a good eighteen months since Zelda and Michael had met at the Lowell High School. The girl was sixteen then and the majority of her classmates a year or two younger. For the most part they were in the shy, adolescent years when the natural impulses of

awakening sex are locked tightly in young hearts, and carefully concealed. She was considerably more sophisticated than they, and fully conscious of the attention she attracted from the older boys belonging to the middle and senior years. At sixteen, throbbing life forces pulsed in her veins. Her instincts were not base; she was a normal, healthy animal, thrilling with sex, radiating sex appeal. Boys, young men, males in general, absorbed her thoughts. Every youth in the school she relegated,—if she found him worthy of notice at all,—to a special place in her mental category. She was not above making eyes at Mr. Cross, the algebra teacher, nor even at Mr. Horton, the principal. For most of the boys she had a contemptuous regard. She, who had sprung from cheap boarding houses, a travelling circus, a second-rate hotel in wide-open, lawless Bakersfield, knew how ignorant they were and what silly bravado they assumed.

Just when she began to notice Michael Kirk, she could not remember. One day when he was at the blackboard doing an algebra problem he became the butt of Mr. Cross' stinging sarcasm. The boy's humiliation and distress went straight to her heart. From that moment she began to love him, but it was a long, long time before she became aware of the fact. Once when she happened to be watching him from across the schoolroom, he raised his head, their gaze met and immediately there was a flash of his white teeth, as his face broke into a quick, wrinkled grin of fun. There was nothing constrained nor self-conscious about it; it meant merely a friendly acknowledgment of her regard. Zelda did an odd thing then. She abruptly averted her eyes to the page of the open book on her desk, and began to blush, a slow wave of hot blood that mounted upwards in a terrifying flood to the roots of her hair. She had no recollection of ever having blushed before in her life. She told herself she hated "that Kirk boy." Resolutely she avoided his eye, but there was hardly a minute of the day when she was not conscious

of his actions. Then came a time when she began to wish for the experience of the blush once more. It had been painful, but thrilling. Their eyes met, and again the flash of teeth, the friendly, wrinkled smile and again the intoxicating stirring of blood, but not so violent, so dizzying as before. He was a "nice" boy, she decided, he had a rather "quaint way" about him. After that, every day there were glances of recognition, an exchange of smiles, till one afternoon, when, walking home from school, she became aware that he, too, was homeward bound, following half a block behind her. Checking her steps, she proceeded more slowly but he came no nearer; she saw that he was regulating his pace to hers. Of a sudden she pretended to twist her ankle, her school books fell to the ground, she clutched a tree to save herself from falling, and writhed half doubled up with make-believe pain. He had no choice but to hurry to her assistance.

"Did you hurt yourself?"

She made a grimace, and smiled. They stood awkwardly near, she supporting herself against the tree with one hand, nursing her ankle with the other, he frowning distress and sympathy. Presently he picked up her books and with his hand beneath her elbow assisted her as she limped home.

That was the beginning of their acquaintance. Afterward Michael would walk up the hill past her house in the morning on his way to school, loitering until she joined him. Sometimes they came home together, but he always left her at her uncle's door after a few minutes of lingering gossip. Young love, adolescent, tender and shy, hardly to be dignified by a more weighty word than the slang term, "case," current then among the boys and girls of Zelda's and Michael's years. Zelda had a "case" on Michael Kirk, but Michael did not analyze his feelings. Zelda Marsh was a wonderful girl, too wonderful for him, that was all. The idea that she might reciprocate his admiration did not occur to him. He

said nothing about her at home. He knew his mother would not approve.

Throughout that first winter this boy-and-girl affair simmered. They laughed a great deal and sent each other notes from desk to desk across the schoolroom. Michael wore a turquoise ring of Zelda's which her father had given her years before, but carefully removed it from his finger when he entered his home. They did not so much as hold each other's hands. Michael was inordinately shy and the moment he was self-conscious he became painfully embarrassed. Zelda liked him too well to frighten him. He troubled her; there was something about him that distressed her; he was not entirely satisfactory.

Then came summer, the close of school. She had a postcard from him postmarked "Rowadennan," then a brief letter containing some blue prints of himself on the tennis court and on horseback, and there were other figures in the pictures, young fellows Michael's age, and girls, girls in white duck skirts and shirtwaists with huge, balloon sleeves. Zelda was surprised at the jealous pang which pierced her. Why, Michael Kirk wasn't worth caring that much about! She wouldn't allow herself to answer him.

It was a distinct disappointment when she returned to school at the beginning of the fall term to learn that he was not coming back. Rumor had it that he was going to art school. She was annoyed, deciding she would not think of him any more. One day she met him on the street and bowed coldly to him, and was instantly sorry for it. Following that, she kept a lookout for him and whenever she caught sight of him, turned a corner, entered a shop, or briskly retraced her steps. She took herself to task for being so foolish about him, but she could not bring herself to meet him face to face.

A month later occurred the encounter in Val Schmidt's drug store. Her aunt had sent her there on an errand, and she and Michael had stood near one

another by the counter for several moments before either had become aware of the other's presence. There had been a sharp clutch at her heart when she recognized him, but instantly his face wrinkled with an embarrassed grin and before she knew it, she had responded with a friendly smile. They left the drug store together, their packages, wrapped in pink paper and tied with green string, under their arms.

"I thought you were mad at me," he ventured, still grinning.

"Oh, no," she answered. "I've seen nothing of you. You've never been near me." She attacked him with some emphasis to forestall reproach.

"I wrote you this summer, and you didn't answer."

"I had no address."

"Why, 'Rowadennan' was enough; I wrote on the hotel paper."

"Well, I didn't know you were staying there. I wasn't sure."

"Did you get the pictures?"

"Yes; you must have had a grand time with all those good-looking boys and girls." There was a faint stress on the "girls."

Michael's face wrinkled.

"They were frights," he stated.

"The boys?"

"No, of course not."

"Do you like art school?" she asked presently.

"Sur-re. We have an awful nice bunch up there. Professor Williams is an awfully nice man; he's an awfully good teacher."

He told her something about the school.

"Do girls go there, too?" she interrupted.

"Sur-re; a whole lot of them. Guess there's two girls for every boy."

"Oh," echoed Zelda faintly. She was annoyed again and they walked on in silence.

"Gee, Zelda—" he began impulsively.

She gave no sign; waves of conflicting emotions were sweeping over her. She wished him to go on and say what the eager, half-breathless tone betrayed, but she could not give him an encouraging glance or word. The gusty afternoon wind blew chaff in their faces, and the wintry sunshine seemed glittering and harsh.

"Can't you come in a minute?" Michael asked. They had reached the Kirk cottage. "Mother isn't home," he went on to explain. "I'd like awfully to show you some of my work."

She followed him down the narrow cement walk that squeezed itself past the house to the back yard, in the rear of which stood his studio. She remained silent as he showed her his rough, quick oil daubs, weekly exercises in composition, and his charcoal studies. Some of the latter were of partly draped men and women. None was completely nude, but there were many drawings of bare arms and legs, breasts and naked torsos, only partially covered with robe or drape. The sketches of the women brought her a queer sensation. She perceived that a world of new values had come to Michael with this study of anatomy, and his association with her own sex in an atmosphere where half-nude men and women exposed themselves. She looked at him with curious, speculating eyes. He was bubbling with enthusiasm in showing off his work; his self-consciousness and shyness had departed, his face glowed with interest. She thought of the woman who would some day be his, his mate or wife, and a giddiness caught her so swiftly that she had to go to the door for air. A tightening was in her throat, her vision blurred.

Ten minutes later she was on her way home, hurrying with quick steps up the hill, the drug store purchase clutched tightly in her hand.

"Oh, this is dreadful, dreadful!" her mind kept repeating; "this won't do at all."

Reaching her room, she flung herself on the bed and buried her burning face in the pillow. She was in love,

but, oh, what a fool he was! How far from suspecting! How unappreciative! Blind, blind,—stupid and blind.

She faced the situation resolutely and set her mind to drive Michael Kirk out of it. She sensed trouble ahead, an unsatisfactory outcome; somehow, something was wrong. Instinct told her to avoid the entanglement. She tried not to think of him—but it was too delicious to let her thoughts conjure him up before her, and to imagine—oh, just to let her imagination carry her on and on. . . . Absurd little Michael Kirk. . . . Foolish little Michael Kirk. . . . Insignificant little Michael Kirk. . . . How ridiculous it was to think of him at all!

December broke, windy and cold, and brought a flurry of snow, the rare, unexpected winter phenomenon which transports all California into a paroxysm of joyous excitement. The school half term had ended and Mr. Horton, the principal, sent Zelda home with a note that unless her work improved she would be relegated to first year's studies, adding that she was a frivolous, demoralizing influence in the school.

This precipitated a scene between Zelda and her uncle that left behind it only a bitter and rebellious memory with the girl. Grim, bearded Caleb Burgess sat in judgment and lectured his wife's niece in the only way he knew to reprimand. The tersely spoken words sank deep into Zelda's consciousness, and she was stirred to furious resentment. She longed to be free—free—*free* to go and come,—free to do as she pleased. She wished. . . .? She did not know *what* she wished except that she did not want restraint, bonds, prison. In the innermost recesses of her heart, had she whispered the truth, she might have wished for Michael Kirk. But nothing would ever come of that! He was only a boy, a beardless youth, a year younger than herself, and without a minimum of gumption!

§ 4

On the evening Doctor Boylston took Zelda to the theatre, she told him sharply that if he did not stop making love to her she would not like him any more. She had been tremendously excited over the prospect of going out with him, and he had taken her to the Baldwin, where the Bostonians were holding forth in *The Serenade*. She had thought Eugene Cowles the most wonderful bass in the world, and Marcia Van Dresser utterly beautiful. The theatre was paradise and she sat on the edge of her orchestra chair straining ears and eyes to catch every sight and sound. And Doctor Boylston irritated her enormously by rubbing his knee against hers now and then, and tickling her arm with soft finger tips. It disgusted her, and she told him so. Toward the end of the evening, he ceased annoying her, behaved himself, called her his "California poppy," and took her, after the show, to Maskey's, where he bought her an ice cream soda. She turned her cheek for him to kiss when they reached home and the doctor had seemed touched and grateful. He held her hand between his two large ones, stroking it gently and murmuring over and over:

"Dear little Zelda, you're awfully good to an old duffer like me—awfully good—really *awfully* good. I like you a lot, Zelda. Guess you think me a pretty old duffer, don't you? Can't help that, but I know I like you a lot. . . ."

§ 5

Zelda "sneaked" the ride to the Beach with Gerald Page. "Sneaked" was the word she used whenever she hoodwinked her uncle and aunt. She was supposed to be doing a Saturday afternoon's shopping downtown, among other errands, taking to Strazinski's her aunt's frizzes to be dressed. She persuaded a girl school friend to undertake these commissions for her, met Gerald by

appointment at this same girl's house, and drove off with him in his smart rubber-tired buckboard behind a spanking team of bays, a gay flutter in her heart and a breast bursting with pride. Gerald seemed very impressive that afternoon with his strong gloved hands gripping the straining reins, his alert gaze under the turned-down brim of his hat watching his trotters' pace, keeping an eye on every passing or approaching vehicle. Zelda, so it seemed to her, had never before rushed so swiftly through space. It was exhilarating, breath-taking, the stiff, salt breeze in her face, the sharp tilt on the speedway when Gerald let his horses go for a few minutes to leave a challenging team summarily behind. There had followed the quarter of an hour on a deserted bit of road in the Park on the return drive, when her companion eased his team to a walk, shifted the reins to his right hand and laid his left arm over the back of the seat to make love to her.

Make love to her? Well, it wasn't fair perhaps to call the queries, murmurs, inflections, the eager regard, the attitude of body half inclined toward her, the encircling arm that did not quite dare to complete its embrace, "making love." Nothing to put a finger on, nothing to point to definitely and say, "That was decidedly significant," "That surely committed him." Just the same, it was "making love," and she was thoroughly aware of it. But he did not stir her. To a less attractive, less confident girl, the attention of this gilded youth might have been flattering. It had little or no effect upon Zelda. She liked the drive. That *was* exciting, but Gerald Page? Pooh! She dismissed him with a mental shrug of the shoulders.

But before her companion resumed his rôle of charioteer, before he gathered the reins in hand again, to start the horses on their brisk homeward trot, he, too, like Doctor Boylston, had her cheek to kiss, the corner of a mouth, in fact, for he had been a little more impetuous than the physician, so that Zelda had to

tell him sharply to behave or she would jump out of his buckboard and walk home.

But the episode of the afternoon that made the expedition memorably precious was not the excitement of outwitting her uncle and aunt, nor of meeting Gerald Page and driving off with him in his smart buckboard right before Gwendolyn Cook's astonished eyes, neither was it the exhilaration of the drive itself, nor the attention they attracted along the way, nor Gerald's obvious interest—but a brief glimpse of two figures strolling along the sandy road just above the beach, a boy and his mother walking along arm in arm.

§ 6

Zelda laid down the evening paper and gazed thoughtfully before her. Ideas, started by the words she had been reading, carried her on and on and on. The article was a half-column notice of a "Pop" concert—a local term for a series of musical entertainments then sponsored by a certain group of music lovers in the city. Mrs. Kirk had been at the piano and the paper spoke enthusiastically of her work as an accompanist.

Zelda was dreaming a dream, allowing her mind to picture a series of incidents, letting her wayward fancy lead her into strange and alluring paths. Suddenly her whole body writhed as a flood of sensation welled up from her toes, engulfing her, and with a quick spasm she shut her eyes and swallowed convulsively.

That afternoon, when her uncle and aunt were out, she telephoned Doctor Boylston at his office. The physician answered with delight when he recognized her voice. She explained she wanted to see him, had a favor to ask; would he find a pretext for coming out for a visit soon? That very evening he appeared. Zelda managed to have a few minutes' conversation with him before her uncle appeared.

"I'm awfully lonely, you know, Doctor," she said,

her appealing dark eyes upturned to his face. "I have nothing to do in the afternoons; Uncle's out and Auntie's always busy, and this old house seems so dark and gloomy, I get the creeps. You know, they think I ought to come straight home from school and study, but after you've been studying all day it's impossible to come home and go on grubbing and grinding. I want some other things to do, something that will amuse me. They won't let me have friends. Sometimes I think I'll go mad here!"

"But, my dear girl, what have you on your mind? Of course, it's hard on you! It's a dreadful shame. What do you want me to do? I'll help you in any way I can. What is it?"

"I want to take music lessons."

"Music?"

"Yes, I want to learn to play the piano."

The man regarded her, bewildered. Zelda hurried on. She described the dreary house in the silent, brooding afternoons, her need of diversion, her hunger for music. There was an old square piano in the corner of the "back parlor" that no one ever touched.

"Think, Doctor, of waking up that lovely old instrument again! I'm just crazy to begin."

"Well, but—but, my dear California Poppy, what have I to do with it?"

"Ask Uncle Caleb to let me take lessons! Go on, Doctor, please make him say yes,—and I'll do anything, anything you like,—and, oh, I'll love you, love you to death."

He caught her wrists but she pulled herself away and vanished as her uncle entered the room.

§ 7

It proved easier than she anticipated to win her ungracious relative to an agreement. Perhaps she did not appreciate the eloquence of her advocate. At any

rate, her uncle told his wife the girl might begin piano lessons if she chose, and at Zelda's suggestion, Mrs. Burgess called upon Mrs. Kirk to arrange matters. But here an unexpected hitch occurred.

Mrs. Kirk declined to take Miss Marsh as a pupil. Her time was filled, she assured Mrs. Burgess, and she was so sorry, as it would have been interesting to have a pupil who lived in the neighborhood. Mrs. Burgess, still ruffled from the interview, conveyed the news to the girl and Zelda was plunged into despair. From her aunt's manner, she suspected that all had not gone smoothly between the two women. Aunt Mary could be annoyingly patronizing when she chose. She took her determination in her own hands, and went to see Mrs. Kirk herself.

With back erect, firm lips rather primly closed, the music teacher listened dispassionately to the young caller's plea.

"Oh, you see, Mrs. Kirk," the girl explained, "it's my only chance. I've got to make the most of this opportunity. I'm only with my uncle and aunt for just a year or two more and then I'll have to go back to—to Bakersfield." Briefly, she sketched her early life and the sordid atmosphere from which her aunt had rescued her. If she overstated the facts a little, no one was present to contradict her. "And I'm entirely willing to go when that times comes and take care of my dear father, but I'd like to go back with some knowledge of music. I'd like to be able to play to him, and to myself. I'm hungry for music, Mrs. Kirk. I've loved it ever since I was a little girl, and I've never had an opportunity to learn. If you'll take me I'll work my fingers to the bone. I'll practise early in the morning, every afternoon, and whenever I can in the evening. Oh, Mrs. Kirk, please say you'll take me, please do, Mrs. Kirk! You'll never be sorry as long as you live."

"There are other competent teachers, Miss Marsh. I shall be very glad to recommend one to you——"

"Oh, but Uncle wouldn't have the same interest. You don't know my uncle, Mrs. Kirk. He's the grimmest kind of a person—oh, he's dreadful!—but he happened to go to the last 'Pop' concert and he heard you——"

"You mean last Thursday night?"

"Yes, last Thursday night, and—oh, he was most enthusiastic about you, and spoke about your technique and sympathetic touch, and while I'm deathly afraid of him still I begged him then and there to let me take lessons from you. I suppose he was still stirred up about the music, for he agreed. He wouldn't feel the same about another teacher, I know."

"Hum-m-m! You don't play at all?"

"No. I just try to pick out a tune now and then with my finger."

"Well, it's very discouraging work to teach a beginner unless she's talented."

"Oh, I think I am. I *know* I am. Music just buzzes through my head all the time, and I'll promise that I'll work every minute that I can spare from school and studies."

"I'll have to fit you in where I can, if I take you."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Kirk, thank you!"

"Two half hours a week. Is that what you wanted?"

"Yes, yes—anything. Just whenever you can squeeze me in."

"One of my pupils is away just now, and I'll give you her time temporarily."

"You're awfully kind, Mrs. Kirk; I truly appreciate it." Zelda rose. For a moment she allowed her eyes to wander from the music teacher's face, sweeping the parlor with a swift, inclusive glance. A nice room, a homelike room. It was cheerful. There was a metronome on a corner of the piano. The piano itself was heaped with neat piles of sheet music. A space was left, however, for a silver-framed photograph, a large photograph of a clean-cut, winning face with smiling eyes, and Zelda's heart gave a queer leap at sight of it.

CHAPTER III

§ 1

FROM the very first Zelda threw herself into her practising with a great deal of characteristic energy, but it was with an idea of impressing her teacher rather than a wish to learn. Mrs. Kirk was frankly pleased. She began to show considerable interest in her new pupil's progress.

For Zelda it was enough to be in Michael's home twice a week, enough to feel certain that the lessons would lead inevitably to some contact with him, enough on Tuesdays and Fridays to gaze at the winning face and smiling eyes in the silver frame.

A week or more went by before she fancied she heard him moving in another part of the cottage,—a receding casual whistle, the bang of a closing door. At the next lesson she purposely left her music roll behind her and went to call for it about six o'clock the same evening. As she hoped, Michael opened the door.

"I forgot my music," she announced.

"Oh!" He was visibly affected by the unexpected sight of her.

She had not been sure of him until that moment; now the emotion he betrayed brought her a happy thrill. He gave her the missing roll and they lingered on the step, the open door directly behind them casting a shaft of warm lamplight into the bluish dusk. A muffled clatter in the direction of the kitchen indicated Mrs. Kirk's safe whereabouts.

"I never see you any more." She was mildly reproachful.

"I . . ." He stopped. "Are you studying, taking lessons from my mother?"

"Yes; for several weeks now."

"I didn't know. She hasn't mentioned it."

"I love music; your mother's wonderful."

He flushed. She could detect the deepening color on his averted cheek, as he scraped an embarrassed foot against the top step.

"She's . . . they say she's a good teacher."

"Ask her if she doesn't think I'm making progress for a beginner."

A pause; muteness between them.

"How are you getting on with your art?"

"Fine, I guess."

"You like it?"

"Sur-re, you bet."

Silence again, self-consciousness. The lamp-lit street was peopled with hurrying shadows, the swiftly moving figures of belated home-goers. A Polk Street cable car bumped noisily, clumsily across the Sacramento Street tracks. Shafts of light gleamed from doors and windows of the corner grocery; the tall, gay jars of red and blue waters in the windows of Val Schmidt's dimly-lit drug store across the way glowed, lambent balls of color. Slowly Zelda descended the three short steps, slowly made her way to the gate, pulled it open, slowly passed through. She did not speak; she did not turn. Emotion choked her. She sensed his agitation; he hers. Waves of feeling rolled between them. Some power was drawing them together. Each felt it, drawing, drawing, drawing. Yet shyness, fear, held him motionless, and sent her silently with dragging feet along the two yards of garden walk to the gate, and to the street.

"Good-bye," she called at the very last, disappearing into the fast gathering twilight.

Hours of wistful wondering; hours of staring up at the stars, thinking strange thoughts, hours of yearning, hours of hope, and hours of fear; hours of sweet agony, hours of grateful sleep, at last; hours of bright morning, and then—happy, exuberant youth with all

the world flashing and glittering. It was glorious to be alive!

Pulses beating high within her, she made her way to the lesson on the succeeding Friday. Not a sound nor sign of Michael. Doubts, disquieting fears. Was she mistaken after all? Was it possible he hadn't been thinking of her?

Heavy of heart and step she made her way homeward. But at the corner of the intersecting avenue he was waiting for her.

"Hello!"

"Ah—it's *you!*"

A whirl of rioting, somersaulting sensation, spinning, spinning, spinning! It was as if a swift, terrific cyclone swept them with a mighty arm to its heart and bore them off together, turning, twisting, flying. No need for words, no need but for an occasional, shy, sidelong glance from glowing eyes.

"I saw you coming down the street a while ago," he said, "but I thought I'd wait till you were through your lesson."

They crossed the wide avenue and climbed the hill slowly toward Zelda's house. They did not speak; excitement held them. As they walked side by side their hands touched and with a spontaneous movement their fingers interlaced. The ecstasy of the contact sent their hearts knocking into their throats.

The girl stopped when they reached the Godfreys' gate. It was unwise to proceed further; beyond the sheltering screen of the intervening fence she and any chance companion, might easily be seen from the Burgess windows.

For a long, steady moment they looked into each other's eyes. Then the boy's face wrinkled into a hundred little lines and furrows, and a happy sound, half laugh, half excited breath escaped from him.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, and there was a quaver in his voice.

"Michael." Her eyes were pools of tenderness.

"Oh, gee," he said again, and this time his happy laugh was more like a sob.

Their hands still clung together. The moment of leave-taking had come; they could not bring themselves to part. They stood drinking in each other's features, their lips stretched with radiant smiles, their faces shining.

"I never thought it would come to this."

"You're, you're wonderful!"

"But, Michael, I don't know what's happened to us."

"Who cares? It doesn't matter, does it?"

"But it's come after such a long time, I mean so long after knowing each other."

"We can't help that . . . Zelda, you *do* care, don't you?"

"Yes,—I care. Guess I always have."

"You mean for me? You mean you've cared for me?"

She nodded slowly, thoughtfully.

"Oh—it's just too wonderful. I just can't believe it. You *can't* think anything about me!"

"But I do."

"Zelda! When every boy I know is crazy about you?"

"That's nonsense. I don't care anything about *them*, at any rate."

"You wouldn't fool me, would you, Zelda? . . .Oh, Lord, you *wouldn't* fool me, would you?"

"Don't be silly. You know this isn't fooling."

"Yes, I know. But what is it? I'm suffering so; it's such a pain."

"Yes; me, too. It's here . . . Dear Michael!"

"Oh, you *wonderful* girl! You're the most wonderful girl I know, and the loveliest!"

"I'm glad you think it."

"I don't see what you can see in a little fool like me."

"You mustn't say such things."

"But I don't amount to much."

"You amount to a lot with me."

"I'm nothing."

"Hush, don't talk that way. I won't let you run yourself down! You're going to be a great artist some day."

"Shucks! I'll never be able to draw. I just go out there to please Mother. But let's not talk about that. Let's talk about,—about something else. When am I going to see you? How soon . . .? Oh, Zelda, you've *got* to make it soon! I just can't go on living unless you make it soon."

"I don't know how it can be arranged. Uncle won't let me go out nights."

"Couldn't you slip out?"

"I wouldn't dare. If they caught me, they'd skin me alive."

"But, Zelda, I can't wait until to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"You mean—you're not going to let me see you to-morrow? . . . I'll be waiting for you after school."

"Oh, no; don't do that. They all know you up there, and if they saw us together it would start a lot of silly gossip."

"Then when *am* I going to see you?" There was almost a wail in his voice.

"You don't have to be waiting so *near* school. I'll join you a block or two away."

"Ah, I see. I'll be on the corner of Bush and Franklin."

"Make it Gough. It's quieter along there and then maybe we can walk up over Holliday's Hill."

"Oh, gee, Zelda!"

"You think a lot of me then?"

"Zelda, I, I—I—— I love you. I love you with all my soul; I love you with all my heart—with all my brain—with all my body! Every inch of me loves you . . . I could *die* for you!"

She squeezed the fingers still interlaced with hers,

but for a moment the happy light died from her face. It grew white, and a shadow of pain passed over it. She shook it away, and let go his hand.

"I have to say good-bye now. My aunt will wonder."

"Zelda——?"

"Yes?"

"You *do* love me?"

"I do . . . too much, I'm afraid."

"Oh, bless you. You couldn't love me too much. No matter how much you cared, it would still be one-sided."

"You say pretty things sometimes, Michael."

"I'll say a lot more now."

"You're a dear!"

"So are you."

"Do you love me?"

"Oh, Lord, how can you ask? You know I do."

"And we meet to-morrow?"

"Yes. I'll be waiting for you on the corner of Gough and Bush. You won't be late? Don't let them keep you in afterwards."

"I won't. I'll steer clear of trouble to-morrow, but I *have* to go now. We mustn't run the risk of being caught. Nobody must suspect a *thing*. You understand that, don't you, Michael? It would be fatal. They'd ship me back to Bakersfield, maybe, and your mother would have a fit."

"I won't tell a soul . . . but I just can't let you go, Zelda."

"I've *got* to go."

"Say you love me, then."

"Oh, Michael, don't be ridiculous."

"But say it."

"I do. Yes. You know I do."

"But say: 'I love you, Michael.'"

"I can't."

"*Yes.*"

"I love you, Michael. . . . Good night!"

She turned and fled from him, running up the front steps of her house, standing close to the inner door while she waited for clumsy, plodding Nora to answer her ring. Not a glance did she vouchsafe him, though she knew he waited. In the entry she leaned against the woodwork, her face covered with both hands, her finger tips tightly pressed against either eyeball, praying she might in some way be freed from the white-hot pain that was tearing her heart from her body.

§ 2

In the very midst of the best residential district in the city stood bleak and sandy Holliday's Hill, two blocks square. The old house, shuttered and deserted, reared itself upon the hill-crest, surrounded by a giant grove of tattered eucalyptus trees. Sand dunes and low scrub tumbled away in hummocky hillocks, littered here and there with rusty cans, moldy newspapers and rubbish. A dipping, uneven wooden walk of rotting, broken boards led from the distant street to the tenantless mansion at the top and uncertain paths wound in and out among the low brush. An air of mystery and decay clung to the place but on fine days nursemaids with their charges wandered there, or bands of small boys marauded through the scrub and sand. When the gray fog stole in from the sea, sheathing the tall and ragged trees about the abandoned house with scarves of white, creeping with spectral, stealthy fingers down over the hill, blotting out unsightly débris in the sandy hollows, weaving its tenuous way through crooked branch and meandering trail, the spot assumed its proper atmosphere. And in such an aspect, Zelda and Michael found it late the following afternoon, as they wandered over its sandy shallows and through the scraggly brush, hand in hand. The fog shielded them, softly, caressingly. They were intoxicated with happiness.

§ 3

In the small greenhouse that stood in a rear corner of the Burgess garden there was always a damp smell of earth. The roof sloped upward to the back of a barn situated in the neighboring yard. The top and sides of the conservatory were of glass; the panes had been daubed with whitewash rendering them opaque. Inside there was a double row of shelves against two parallel walls, on which stood red earthen flowerpots, large and small. Begonias thrived here in profusion as well as other plants the gardener brought into the house for Aunt Mary's wire stand in the bay window of the library. Smilax climbed luxuriously on strings tacked to the rafters, and on the floor were great cement pots of feathery asparagus plants, trained over hooped wires.

It was a cozy place in which to take refuge on Sunday afternoons. The gardener was away on Sundays and no one else ever looked into it at any time. At the further end was a rusty iron garden bench. A heavy perfume of growing plants and scented blooms mingled with the smell of the moist earth. It was warm and tropical in the little house, and the fragrance of the flowers was often dizzying.

§ 4

A famous singer came to San Francisco and it happened that her accompanist met with an accident to his hand. Mrs. Kirk was engaged to fill his place, and it was necessary for her not only to be present at the concert in the city and the one across the bay, but the diva, enthusiastic over her work, persuaded her to come with her to Los Angeles. Mrs. Kirk reluctantly cancelled several of her lessons, and was away from home three days.

In Michael's studio an air of privacy and enchantment prevailed. There was no fear of interruption dur-

ing his mother's absence. The little building creaked and complained on its unsteady supports with any hasty movement, but nobody was near to hear, nor if one did, to investigate. The gay posters on the walls gave the room a cheery atmosphere and the sun streamed through the skylight in the roof in a flood of golden radiance. Everything about the place spoke intimately of the young artist to whom it belonged; it seemed to reflect all his personality. Zelda liked to touch things in it, the burlapped walls, the easel, his brushes. He and she had three happy afternoons there, skylarking with the lay figure whom they made perform queer antics dressed in Zelda's hat and coat. She posed for Michael, and he made a creditable charcoal likeness of her head. On the last occasion he had a "party" for her. When she arrived, she found ice cream and an angel cake set forth on the little collapsible dressmaker's table that belonged to his mother, and in its centre was a great bowl of fragrant violets from the front garden.

Happy hours, clouded with the first battle of passion, with fear of the unknown, fear of authority, fear of themselves.

§ 5

"What are we going to do, Michael?" Zelda spoke in troubled tones.

"Dearest, I wish I knew."

"We just can't go on this way."

"No. It's—it's terrible. It's killing us both."

A long moment of frowning study.

"I suppose we ought to say good-bye," she said after a time.

"You mean, give each other up?"

"Yes."

"But . . ."

"Oh, I know," the girl sighed wearily, stroking his hand with gentle fingers.

"Zelda, I just can't do it."

She shut her eyes and rested her head against the cushions. His own drifted to her shoulder. His hair, sandy, rumpled, smelled of the fragrance peculiar to him.

"They'd laugh at us," she said, despairingly.

"My mother . . ." he began.

"Oh, I know, I know,—but what are we going to do?" she repeated in an outburst, straightening herself.

His hands covered his young face, his fingers wreathed themselves into his tumbled hair. She drew his head into her lap, smoothing the disordered locks. A yearning, almost an agony, welled up in her. Tears sprang to her eyes. She let them fall. He was hers, her little boy, her own. Love suffocated her, strangled her. She cradled his head in her arm and bent low over him, straining him to her.

"Oh, Michael, Michael, Michael," she whimpered.

"Don't, Zelda—I just can't . . . can't. . . ."

They roused presently and pressed wet faces together.

"We couldn't run away?" she suggested.

His look of helplessness answered.

"If we went to them," she persisted hopelessly, "if we went first to your mother, then to my uncle . . ." The absurdity stopped her. "I might write my father," she proposed. A vision of the half-blind old man and Matea pottering about the dilapidated shack in Bakersfield silenced her again.

Michael put his arms about her and held her in a close embrace. Ah, to be loved so, to be loved by the one whom she so desperately, so fiercely loved,—that was heaven's bliss! Wave after wave of ecstasy swept through her. She wrenched herself from his arms, pushing him from her. The agony of yearning was more than she could endure. Exhausted, she sank down upon the couch, racked with desire. He came to her and

touched her. With what remnant of strength she could still command, she rolled from him.

"Don't," she panted. Her tone was fierce, her teeth clenched, her eyes blazing.

§ 6

A long night of wakefulness and misery. . . . What was that he had said? . . . How wistfully he had looked as he said it. . . . Did he truly love her? . . . Yes, of that she was sure. It wasn't as bad as if he didn't, as if it were only herself who cared. But was it? Could anything be worse than this fearful longing that was consuming her? . . . Ah, Michael, Michael, Michael! . . . She beat her fists together, her eyes shut, her lips close pressed. Impatiently she flung the bed covers back, went to the open window and rested her forehead against the back of her hot hand. The black pool of the garden lay below; she could distinguish the graceful hoops of the willow's branches against the sky, the dim white outline of the greenhouse. There, that Sunday afternoon, ah, what rich and golden hours! She and Michael had nearly been caught the last time they were there. Doctor Boylston had come into the garden looking for her, they had heard him calling her name and had crouched down in a dim, dirty corner, clinging tremblingly together. It seemed months ago!

What was she going to do? What was she going to do? The same old question, over and over. She couldn't blame Michael. Blame him for what? . . . Well, for not having the courage to take their lives and destinies into his hands, and face the world with her as—as—man and wife. *Man and wife!* That was funny,—the thought of herself and Michael as man and wife. Yet that was what they ought to be. Michael *was* pretty young to be a husband! Seventeen! He wasn't more than a boy, an overgrown boy, but, oh, God in Heaven,

how she loved him! Blame him for not getting work in some town or village where she could come to him as soon as he was able to support her? No, she could not blame him for not doing that. But if she were in his place, *she* would do it, *she* would find a way, *she* would fight mother, aunt, uncle, the world if necessary!

§ 7

They met one night in her garden. During the afternoon they had been together, but there had been no satisfaction in just the touch of fingers and hands. Their hungry eyes had spoken to each other. They longed for each other's arms and lips.

Zelda was supposed to study in her room after dinner. One evening toward nine o'clock as she was struggling over her Virgil there came the sound of a sharp clip against her window. She needed no repetition of the summons. Instantly, she extinguished the gas and raised the window. Below in the garden stood Michael's figure.

"Michael!"

"Pist,—is it all right?"

"Yes; they can't hear you if you don't talk too loud."

"I had to come."

"You're a dear. Your mother?"

"Oh, I told her I was going to see a friend. She's all right. . . . You couldn't slip out?"

"I'm afraid. Hong always goes off to Chinatown every night and takes the back door key with him, and they'd catch me if I went out the front way."

"I'd like to see you a minute."

"Well, you know I'd like to see *you.*"

"Do you love me, Zelda?"

"Ssssh!"

"You *do,* don't you?"

"Ah, Michael."

"I can't think of anything else but you. I'm always trying to draw pictures of you when I'm at school."

"Somebody may see you some day, and then our secret will be out."

"No fear; I'm very careful. But must this always be a secret?"

"Well,—you know."

"I wish I could see you. I couldn't scramble up? I'm pretty sure I could get to that roof. What's below there?"

"Hong's room. That's the laundry and he has a room directly over it."

"He's out, isn't he?"

"I know."

"Well, let me try."

"No—no. I wouldn't dare. They'd hear us talking . . . wait! . . ."

"What is it?"

"I have an idea." She hesitated.

"Tell me," he urged.

There was silence at the window, then again, in a low compelling whisper, "Wait."

Swiftly she slipped from her room to the bath room adjoining. This was her own; no one ever used it but herself. Flat against the wall, held in place by two zinc loops at the top, stood the ladder by which access to the attic was obtained. It was about fifteen feet long, clumsy but not heavy.

Zelda grasped it in her hands, freed it from its supports, and leaned it a moment against the wall. Next she ascertained that the hall was deserted, and with stealthy movement shoved the long, unwieldly contrivance through one door, then through the other, poked one end out of the open window and lowered it until it touched the roof below. It just reached.

"I'll come up."

"No," Zelda commanded; "don't you *dare*. I'm coming down."

He caught her as she leaped from the low eaves of the laundry roof. Instantly they were locked in each other's arms.

§ 8

The first of many nocturnal meetings. They lived for them. Michael told his mother there was an extra class in the evenings at Professor Williams's school, a course in anatomy. It was Zelda's invention, and Mrs. Kirk accepted it. It took her son away from her two or three times a week, but he was learning to become an artist, and she had visions of the *Beaux Arts*.

Not once since Zelda had come to make her home with them, had Caleb Burgess or his wife glanced into her room after she had retired for the night, and it was safe to assume that there would be small chance of their ever doing so.

Love—passion—young hearts beating together—young bodies throbbing in embrace.

"No, it mustn't be . . ." fought Zelda. Michael was a mere boy; the responsibility was hers.

Weakening, exhausting meetings, when strength ebbed and determination faltered.

Inevitably it happened, there under the willow.

She had thought she loved him before; now she loved him a thousand times more fiercely.

Struggle again. It was madness. Fear consumed her. This way spelled ruin; she ran a greater risk of losing him now than before. She must not, *must not* submit again. Yet with this conviction strong and positive within her, a power over which she had no control dragged at her limbs, her hands and feet, and forced her into his waiting arms, forced her to accompany him down the shadowy hill, forced her to slip cautiously along the narrow walk between his cottage and the bordering fence to seek with him the unlit privacy of the little studio. Mrs. Kirk suspected nothing. She believed her son went straight to bed after he came home from the art school.

CHAPTER IV

§ 1

THREE months elapsed, and during that time word of her father's death came to Zelda from Bakersfield. It saddened her a little but she was far from feeling any real grief. Since she had come to live with her uncle and aunt she had heard from neither her father nor Matea. Occasionally she had written but there had been no reply. The old Scotch carpenter who had lived for so many years next to the Gastronomic Hotel telegraphed the news. Zelda and her aunt went down to the funeral, a dismal, forlorn affair with a weeping, stout Matea shrouded in heavy black veiling, riding in the undertaker's buggy behind the hearse.

There were a few hundred dollars left for Zelda by her father's will, and these the girl suggested be turned over to the woman who had cared for the half-blind old man during the final helpless years of his life, but to this Uncle Caleb said an emphatic "No." On her return to San Francisco, he elected to take a sudden but decided interest in her affairs and education. It was obvious her legacy had been a disappointment to him. He informed her with no mincing phrases, that since her inheritance was so small, she must set about promptly preparing herself for self-support. He did not propose to be responsible for her longer. He made her leave high school and enroll for a short course in bookkeeping and stenography at Heald's Business College.

Zelda felt she had never been wholly welcome in her uncle's home; now she saw that her presence there was hardly more than tolerated. Her aunt looked at her

with distressed eyes and a troubled frown which gave her niece the impression that the fault, whatever it might be, was her own. A distressing tension prevailed in the gloomy Burgess house. Zelda longed for escape. She threw herself with determination into the business course, eager for independence, seeing herself eventually successful, financially comfortable, in a little flat somewhere which she herself would be able to maintain, Michael coming to her there, marriage possibly, freedom at any rate from his selfish, exacting mother, and from her own cold, domineering relatives,—she and he united to one another before all the world. She talked it over with him. Squinting, grinning, wrinkling to his hair, he agreed and told her it was a "fine idea." He troubled her; he was not concerned for the future, only too willing to live each day as he found it, content to let the morrow take care of itself. And yet the morrow, Zelda foresaw, held disaster for them both, censure, disruption, unless steps were taken to avoid them. She was not content to go on surrendering to Michael. She loved him too much. Apparently he loved her, She did not doubt his affection, had no fault to find with him in that respect; but she did find fault with his easy, amiable optimism, his childish faith that everything was going to work out to everybody's satisfaction; he and Zelda should have each other, his mother would be pleased, Zelda's relatives would add their blessing, they were all to live in an idyllic state of sweetness, love and harmony. He refused to be alarmed. It was Zelda who did the worrying.

Yet in spite of the bitter atmosphere prevailing in her uncle's home, the strangeness of the business college, the coarseness of her new associates who were, in many cases, years her senior and had sprung from humbler homes than the one to which she had grown accustomed, the thought of Michael and her love for him, memories of their last meeting, the trembling pleasure at the anticipation of the one to come, filled her days

with summer gladness. Trouble, worry, concern for the future, fear, these were ever with her, but not one of them lessened her joy in her love or in her lover. She bloomed with radiant health and beauty, glowed with the secret buried in her heart and shared only with him who was hers, she laughed and was merry, her step was buoyant, her voice rich with deeper tones. Neither concern for the future nor the heavily curtained old house in which her uncle moved with ponderous, silent step, could check her high spirits or her song.

§ 2

Then one night occurred the catastrophe she feared. Michael's mother, a trailing dressing gown clutched to her bosom, her gray hair in tight crimps pinned to her papery forehead, a gleaming lamp held high above her head, appeared suddenly in the doorway of the studio, and advanced upon the boy and girl where they lay. Zelda was to remember for the rest of her life those pinched, putty-white lips and the quivering nostrils of that glaring, horrified face.

A sordid, terrible scene ensued. Zelda shook with sick tremors whenever, in the months to come, the degradation of it came back to her. Her love, hers and Michael's, was branded foul and what she had thought beautiful, was denounced as shameful, lustful. She had no defense to offer against Mrs. Kirk's tirade. For a smarting moment she had been roused to indignant rejoinder, but a glance at Michael's stricken face closed her lips. There was no fight in the boy she loved so dearly; he would never champion her in that maternal presence. He stood by with hanging head and twisting fingers while his mother hurled abuse and invective upon the girl. Stinging under the lash of her words, Zelda donned her hat and jacket as best she could, and walked silently out into the darkness, to stumble, crying, up the hill, climbing for the last time to Hong's roof

and up the ladder to her room where, crushed, beaten, raging, she gave herself over to the sleepless misery of the night.

§ 3

The next morning Mrs. Kirk called on Mrs. Burgess, and Mrs. Burgess promptly sent for her husband.

The bleak December day was cold and wet, a scudding rain slanted across the windows. The garden dripped and the cement walks, turned black by the rain, reflected uncertain, treacherous lights and shadows. The house was cold and Zelda had donned a woolen street coat in an effort to keep off the chill as she sat in her room, penning a long outpouring of love to Michael. She knew they would be parted, but there was comfort at that hour in telling him how dearly she loved him and how true she would remain to him, always.

Aunt Mary rapped on Zelda's door and opened it immediately. One glance, and Zelda knew that Mrs. Kirk had communicated with her. There was an expression on her aunt's face that froze the girl's heart. At once her mind leaped to Uncle Caleb . . . yes, he would be told, of course, and here was something graver, more terrifying to be considered! He could do no more than turn her out of doors!

"You're to go to bed," Aunt Mary announced. Her lips were trembling, and Zelda observed she pressed them together to keep them still.

"Hurry up," her aunt directed, "your uncle wants you to go straight to bed."

"What for?" Zelda demanded. There was a faint note of defiance in her voice. He couldn't be going to whip her!

"You're not to ask. Do as your uncle commands."

Aunt Mary, her forearms crossed before her, an elbow clasped in either hand, stood firmly in the centre of the room, watching her. Zelda, a dark shadow of suspicion and rebellion across her face, reluctantly

obeyed. Then Aunt Mary surprised her. She opened the closet door, removed all the clothing, picked up the garments the girl had just laid aside, made a great armful of the whole, and departed. She returned presently and took away the shoes and hats. There was not so much as a cap or a dressing sacque left behind. Her purpose then dawned upon the girl. Zelda was to be kept a prisoner until they decided what her punishment should be. Nora silently, clumsily brought up her meals on a tray. Zelda saw no one else for three days.

The isolation, suspense, and fear that hourly increased, were of themselves a punishment, the effectiveness of which her stern, relentless uncle would have enjoyed had he guessed it. Her heart was sick within her; she wanted Michael so desperately, but there was no way to send him word, no way to let him know how she longed for him, how much he was in her thoughts. His mother doubtless was making it as disagreeable for him as Zelda's uncle was for her. The boy and girl needed each other, and their families were set upon keeping them apart. One of them probably would be sent away. Michael? . . . More likely herself. . . . But where could they send her?

On the morning of the fourth day Uncle Caleb's heavy step approached her door; summarily he opened it. How Zelda hated his scowling face and his black Mormon beard! She was afraid of him just as Aunt Mary and Nora were. He enjoyed having people afraid of him. Even now he stood at the footboard of her bed and studied her frightened face with obvious satisfaction. Then he began to talk in short, terrible sentences, each like a volley of bullets. He spoke of herself, her wickedness, her dishonor. He used terms that stung like whip lashes. He referred to her father slurringly, saving that little should be expected of a daughter of such a ne'er-do-well. He told Zelda that on the following morning he

would take her to Saint Catherine's, an institution for the disciplining and regeneration of fallen girls, and there she would be locked up for three months. He would keep her there longer if he could, he assured her, but she would be of age then and the law did not give him the power to shut her up after she was eighteen. When she left the institution, she was to look for no further help from him; she would have to make her way in the world as best she could. He and his wife were done with her forever.

Not for an instant did Zelda entertain the thought of allowing herself to be taken to Saint Catherine's. The misgivings, the heart-breaking suspense of the previous three days vanished. She was on her feet, pacing the floor, her mind galloping, galloping, galloping. . . . Take her and lock her up, would they? Send her to a reform school . . . to a house of refuge! Not if she knew herself. . . . She'd be gone in the morning when they came to carry her off, clothes or no clothes. There were always the ladder and the window. But suppose flight could be accomplished, what then? They'd come after her, they'd bring her back no matter where she hid. No; she would have to plan against that. She would go where no one could find her. A journey? That took money. On went the galloping thoughts. She needed someone to help her, someone she could trust.

The rain slithered across the window panes all day. The garden smelled dank and earthy, a sparrow hugged the window ledge for an hour or two in the afternoon, its head snuggled down upon its body, its feathers ruffling in the gusty wind. At four o'clock Hong brought down Zelda's trunk from the attic and Aunt Mary came to pack it. The girl's clothes reappeared, were laid away in the trays, her personal possessions were wrapped and stored in it, then the lid was closed and locked, and Aunt Mary carried off the key. Zelda watched her relative as she went about the task, with a curious wonder in her mind as to what sort of person the woman

really was. She seemed to have been emptied of emotion.

As the dinner hour approached a calm settled upon the girl. She was surprised at her calmness. A few minutes after she heard her aunt go downstairs, she tiptoed cautiously to the bannister rail and listened. She could hear her aunt and her uncle at the table, the flowing murmur of the former, and the occasional clatter of cutlery and cups. Composedly, with deliberation she went to the closet in Aunt Mary's room and helped herself to shoes, an old skirt, a jacket and a bonnet. She had even the forethought to take an umbrella. These she carried to her room, and hid them. It was all as simple as that. An hour later Nora came for her tray, and at ten o'clock she heard her uncle and aunt climb the stairs to go to bed. Presently silence wrapped the house. Zelda managed the ladder without mishap. She dressed in her aunt's clothing, and for the last time made the descent, reaching cautiously for each rung of the ladder as she felt her way down into the pool of darkness below her.

There was no Michael waiting to catch her after the final leap from the eaves of Hong's roof. She stole silently through the blackness and rain down the walk, passed the fish pond and the fuchsias tacked to the Godfreys' fence, opened the iron gate and reached the street. A block and a half further on she paused in front of Michael's silent, shuttered cottage. He and his mother had gone to bed. Midnight was not far off. She lingered a moment or two with one hand on the paling of the picket fence, gazing at the closed and rayless windows. The thought of stealing one glimpse of the studio passed through her mind, but she put it from her.

She hurried past Val Schmidt's drug store for she was known there. Some other telephone would do. Better to telephone first, she decided. Most of the shops along Polk Street were closed now, but she hoped Roberts' candy store would be open. She was a few min-

utes too late, however. The door was bolted and one of the girls was hurrying through her last preparations before departing. Zelda boarded a Sutter Street "dummy" heedless of the rain. There was a risk of being recognized "inside." As the car bounced and rattled up over the hill, and thence down town, she decided to abandon the idea of telephoning. All the stores were closed, the streets empty and shining wet, glistening with the reflections of gas lamps. At Kearny Street she dismounted and walked the short block to Bush. There were plenty of men abroad here, loafers slouching along with sardonic eyes beneath turned-down hats and upturned collars. One of them tried to speak to her, but she hurried on. She was a little self-conscious when she reached the hotel. Her aunt's skirt was too long and she had pinned it up, but one of the safety pins had given way, so that now the skirt sagged, wet and bedraggled. The bonnet, too, perched on the top of her head, looked queer. She eyed the clerk at the desk evenly, meeting his curious gaze, but her voice failed when she asked for Doctor Boylston, and she had to repeat his name.

CHAPTER V

§ 1

The Fuller Building was situated on Market Street in one of the gores formed by the junction of a diagonal side street. It was an old, dark building given over to doctors' and lawyers' offices, insurance brokers and land agencies. A wheezy elevator mounted lugubriously to the fourth and top floor, operated by a rope upon which the attendant heaved whenever he wished to start or stop it. The cage rattled and bumped its way up and down and frequently with an extra heavy jolt, jarred the entire building. A wide, uncarpeted stairway wound itself around the elevator shaft, the halls too were uncarpeted, and the wooden floors resounded to footfalls or the occasional reverberating clamor of a closing glass-panelled door.

Zelda did not mind it so much in the daytime, but at night, except when the doctor was with her, she knew that she was utterly alone in the great echoing barrack, and the thought terrified her. Probably the janitor prowled about somewhere down in the basement, but he retired after midnight into some particular lair of his own. Promptly at six in the evening the charwomen appeared to clean up the offices, and often the choking smell of dust and broom sweepings penetrated into Zelda's quarters. These women departed about ten, and long periods of silence would ensue, sometimes broken alarmingly, with the suddenness of a pistol shot, by the quick slam of a door, and the rapid tread of departing steps. Again and again, Zelda would be startled out of her sleep by some inexplicable sound that in the dead of night would go echoing through the empty

building. She fought her fears in unceasing battle. Her door was heavily bolted with an extra Yale lock the doctor had had placed there; he had given her a small revolver which she was certain she could and would use if occasion arose; he had reasoned with her again and again and each time had convinced her that she was safer in the cavernous, empty office building than she would be in a peopled hotel, yet the terrors of the night persisted.

The physician's offices in that same cavernous structure had seemed a welcome refuge on the drizzly December night in which she had run away from her uncle's home, and the doctor had taken her there. Her note scribbled at the hotel counter had brought Boylston promptly down from his room and he had at once suggested his office, where they might talk unmolested and unobserved. He had driven her to the Fuller Building in a hack and Zelda remembered how the horse's hoofs had slipped on the wet cobbles. Then the four small rooms, smelling of ether and disinfectants, with their glass cabinets of ugly, shining steel instruments. At last she had been free to give way to her feeling of forlornness, and Doctor Boylston, after a judicious closing of the two transoms that opened into the hall, had let her weep.

Everything that had happened since had followed automatically. She had known beforehand the doctor would be kind, understanding and sympathetic. He had proved himself all of these, had assured her that the best plan would be for her to make herself as comfortable as possible for the night on the leather couch in the reception room, had produced a rug and an old overcoat, even a pillow, and had promised to be down to see her early in the morning when they would talk the situation over and decide what she had better do. He assured her he would say nothing of her whereabouts to her uncle, and would never permit her to be taken to Saint Catherine's.

"My darling little California poppy," he said, "you come to an old duffer like me to help you when you are in trouble, and I'd be the lowest-lived scoundrel on foot if I betrayed you."

He had kept his word, and later often amused Zelda by telling her how deliberately he annoyed her uncle and aunt by inquiring whether they had any trace of their niece, or if she had written. Old Burgess had told him finally not to speak of her.

On her first morning Zelda had been hardly awake, before there came a quick step in the hall, a rap of knuckles against the glass of the door, and the reassuring voice of Doctor Boylston from the hall. When he entered she saw he had brought a loaf of French bread, a paper bag of eggs, and the makings of a pot of coffee. He set about very dexterously preparing breakfast for the two of them, and presently they were laughing over the Bunsen burner in his laboratory that would not work satisfactorily, and had a merry time over the repast when it was finally achieved.

"I don't see why you don't stay right here, Zelda," the doctor counselled. "It's the last place in the world they'd look for you."

"I thought of Bakersfield maybe," she replied.

"Well, if you went there, what could you do? You're known, your uncle would soon get word of your whereabouts, and promptly send after you. He's not the kind to let the matter drop; he feels you've got the better of him and he'll leave no stone unturned until he tracks you down and lands you in Saint Catherine's. I know him. Stay here for a few days anyhow. I've got a rest room here, where sometimes I put a patient I'm treating. It's a box of a place but you could be comfortable there for a while until the search for you dies down. I'll get you some books and some decent bedding and I'll fix matters up so we can have our three meals here together, and if you stay here, they'll never guess where you are."

She listened to him with frowning eyes and hands tightly clasped. At the moment she felt woefully forlorn and helpless.

"I wish . . ." she ventured.

"Yes?"

"Doctor Boylston," she went on impulsively, "you've been awfully good to me, marvellously good. Would you do me just one more favor?"

He waited with an interrogating, cocked eyebrow.

"Would you send Michael Kirk a message from me?"

He pursed his lips, and slowly, definitely shook his head.

"You'd only succeed in letting them know where you're hiding. I'm doing the best I can for you, Zelda, but you rather take the wind out of my sails by wanting to go on with that affair. I think you'd better drop it."

"But you haven't any idea how I love him, Doctor!"

"Isn't he a good deal younger than you?"

"A year."

"He seems younger than that,—a mere schoolboy."

"But I will—I *must* see him," Zelda emphatically declared.

"Well, well, well, well, well," her companion said soothingly. "That can take care of itself by and by. Certainly I should advise you to make no effort to communicate with him now. It would merely advertise where you are and I should get myself into a peck of trouble. You only have to keep out of the way for three months and then they cannot touch you."

§ 2

And what sad, curious and eventful three months they had been, thought Zelda on an early March day as she stood gazing out upon noisy, teeming Market Street from between the Nottingham lace curtains of

the one window that faced the street. It was difficult to understand how it had all come about, to trace the trivial incidents of each day that had resulted in her present circumstances and life.

To stay those first few days and nights in Boylston's office had seemed the only course for her to pursue. The doctor had done everything he promised toward making her comfortable. He had supplied covers and sheets for the couch in the rest room, as well as books and magazines, and they had had companionable and laughing times over meals in the laboratory. Zelda had not dared to venture out. For the first week or ten days the only person she saw from early morning until midnight were the physician and the charwoman who came in for an hour in the evening. Almost every time he entered the office he brought her a small gift, and finally she entrusted him with a list of toilet articles and some other necessities of which she had been in need. But after a few days it had become stupid, tiresome, sitting hour after hour cooped up in the little cubbyhole off the consultation room. Doctor Boylston's office hours were from two until six in the afternoon. Often patients drifted in as late as seven o'clock. He made his rounds in the morning. During the forenoon Zelda had the suite to herself and could wander about it as she chose. At best she did not find it diverting. The doctor would come in shortly after twelve, and they would cook their luncheon together in the laboratory. The first twist of the bell in the front door clarioned the commencement of Zelda's afternoon imprisonment. She had to fly at once to her sanctum and remain there until the last caller departed. She would read or sew until she grew weary and then stretch herself out on the couch, —at night her bed,—to stare up at the ceiling and wonder about herself. From the adjoining room she could distinctly hear the doctor's voice intermingling with his patient's.

"It's a very persistent pain, Doctor. . . . Right here in the groin. . . ."

"H'mm . . . I doubt if it's your appendix. How do you sleep nights?"

"I have the most violent nausea every morning. . . ."

"That will pass. Try a little soda in water."

"My husband insisted upon my coming to see you, Doctor."

"I think he'd better come in himself."

"Doctor Crookshank performed the laparotomy. . . .

Terrible details, terrible discussions. Zelda had no choice but to listen. Once a man groaned, cursed, and the doctor soothed him with: "There, that's all, it's out now." A woman screamed, there was a sound of wrestling and then her sobbing, grateful accents: "Oh, thank you, Doctor, *thank* you, *thank* you!"

Sometimes Zelda stopped her ears with her fingers, sometimes cried to herself, sometimes the thought of spending another day in that hateful office seemed intolerable. She would chance escape, she would risk being brought back to the dreary, dismal Burgess house, Saint Catherine's would be better than such a prison! . . . And ever before her mind stood Michael with his sweet, grinning, winning face and his shining eyes shut to slits of merriment. What had they done with him? Did he think she had forgotten him?

Boylston soon observed the wanness and pallor of her face. He was all concern. His California poppy was drooping in her hiding place. He brought her more gifts, jellies and potted delicacies; among many other things a dark blue disguising veil with a deep hem, and took her out to an obscure little restaurant for dinner, afterwards to a band concert at the Mechanics Pavilion. That was the beginning of many discreet expeditions. He went with her to a certain shop, open in the evenings, and bought her a pretty dress, a quiet street outfit

and a becoming hat. One of the places they were accustomed to visit was the Chutes, and Zelda liked to sit beside the lagoon and through the blue mist of her veil watch the frantic clutches and hear the wild screams of the occupants of each boat that shot down the long, slippery incline and bounced in great leaps across the water below. No one accosted them; once or twice Doctor Boylston was forced to acknowledge salutations, but his companion went unrecognized.

The days, however, became more and more unendurable. The intimate revelations of human ailments and human secrets confided to the doctor in the belief that they were for his ears alone, got upon Zelda's nerves. The disclosures were often horrible. She detested the enforced eavesdropping, for it began to be borne in upon her that there was more vileness in the world than she had ever dreamed. Bakersfield with its vice and lawlessness was a city of Zion compared to the Sodoms and Gomorrahs from which had sprung some of the foul and diseased creatures who came for medical assistance where often none was possible. One day a particularly hideous story shocked Zelda to her heart's core. She decided she could stand the strain no longer. Her uncle and Saint Catherine's were better than this terrible daily ordeal. She told the doctor that same night after the last patient had departed, she would have to leave.

"But, my dear little poppy," Boylston remonstrated, "why didn't you say something like this before! Of course, it's outrageous for you to be shut up in there and have to listen to all that rubbish."

"I don't see how you endure it, Doctor Boylston!"

"I make my living that way, my dear."

"I'll have to go back to Uncle Caleb——"

"Nonsense. You'll do nothing of the sort. You've stuck it out for three weeks now. You'll be as free as air in as many months."

"I can't stand it here another twenty-four hours.

Can't I go somewhere else? Can't you find me a boarding house? I once stayed with a Mrs. Haggerty on Shotwell Street when I was a little girl."

"And have everyone instantly suspect that there's something odd about an unattached, pretty girl like you, and have them start talking about you and the police investigating?"

"The police?"

"Certainly, the police. Your uncle's given your name to the police and offered a reward for any news of you."

"Oh!"

"There's no need of your being alarmed. You and I have outwitted them so far. We can solve this situation so you'll be satisfied, and if you'll learn to grow a little fond of an old duffer like me, *I'll* be satisfied."

"But you know, Doctor Boylston, how grateful I am to you for all you've done for me."

"Are you?"

"Oh, Doctor, you *know* it."

"You never kiss me or anything."

"I may want to some day when I'm more like myself."

"You've had a hard time."

"And there's Michael, you know, Doctor," Zelda added bravely.

The man's brow clouded.

"I don't think you do very right by me in thinking about that young jackanapes." His tone was a trifle sharp. There was a moment's constrained silence.

"Well, I'll wait," the doctor announced as if long ago he had thought out the situation.

"Now, let's see what we can do about this room proposition," he continued with a change of tone. "Of course you can't go on living in that two-by-four cupboard. It isn't a bit fair to you. I won't permit it to continue. We'll find something decent for you right away."

Late that same afternoon he told her his solution.

"One more night here," he said, patting her shoulder affectionately, "and to-morrow you can move into your own home."

Another physician's suite directly adjoining Doctor Boylston's had fallen vacant a month or two before. What could be more simple than for Zelda to move in there? It was considerably more convenient for light housekeeping than Boylston's rooms, and there was even a connecting door between the two apartments. He and Zelda would sally forth in the morning,—he would take a day off and she would carefully wrap her face up in her blue veil,—and they would furnish the two and a half little rooms from door mat to teaspoon. It would be safer for her there than in any other place in the city.

In the evening he produced the key of the connecting door, and took her in to view the new quarters.

"You see this would have to be your bedroom and back here would be your living room although its windows look out only on a brick wall, but the laboratory, which will be your kitchen, opens off the inside room, and if you ever had me in to dinner with you,"—this with a knowing smile,—"we could have our little feed there very comfy, don't you think?"

He painted her occupancy of the new quarters in alluring colors. The first real happy catch at her heart in three weeks came to her.

"This shall be your own, all your very own," Doctor Boylston told her.

"You mean mine, my own home!" Zelda repeated delightedly. Swift thoughts of the attic, the wine closet, the greenhouse, and the branches of the willow tree.

"Why, certainly."

She bit her lips to silence a little gay excited laugh.

"And could I have a cat or a puppy-dog to keep me company?"

"You can have a cat or a puppy-dog to keep you

company," the doctor repeated, his eyes twinkling with amusement as he watched her. Her own suddenly misted with happiness.

"You're very good to me," she said with a lip that slightly trembled.

"Zelda, it's the most joy I've ever known, being good to you," he said thickly, and took her in his arms. In gratitude she leaned her head against him, and even put a hand about his shoulder.

"Zelda, my little girl, my little poppy," he whispered. "You *do* care for an old duffer like me, don't you?"

"You're very kind to me," she answered.

"Some time could you give me a little kiss?"

She looked up at him. His eyes through the rimless nose-glasses shone with emotion and his mouth was twisted with feeling. At the moment he seemed singularly pathetic,—a kind of hungry little boy, and she raised her lips to his without reserve.

"Ah, Zelda, Zelda," he cried when he had released her, "you don't know how I love you;—you're wonderful, do you know that? Just *wonderful!* . . . My Zelda-poppy!"

And the next chapter in the story was a happy day spent together at a second-hand dealer's buying a few pieces of heavy, but rather impressive plush furniture for the new home, chairs, a double bed, rugs, a gas stove, plates, knives, kitchen ware, table and bed linen, a carpet sweeper, a mirror, a brave picture of a Roman chariot race, and a white ball of fur, hardly bigger than Zelda's two fists, with a pink nose, a pink tongue, and pink ears, that became "Ginger," and blinked comfortably at her mistress during the next few days as she moved tables and chairs about, straightened, tacked and measured.

"Oh, you darling, darling, darling," Zelda would interrupt her work to say into the white fluff held close to her lips. "What should I ever do without you? You're the only real friend I have in all this world."

From the very first night, Ginger shared her bed, curling herself up beside the pillow, pink nose out of sight, and Zelda would often make herself lie awake until the kitten was safely asleep. To the tickle of white fur upon her lips, the girl would whisper "Michael," and the hot scalding tears would burn her nose and cheeks as they trickled upon the pillow beneath her head.

Little by little,—little by little. The day came when she announced to Doctor Boylston that she was completely established, and they had a feast in celebration. Zelda,—chef's daughter that she was,—knew how to cook and to cook well, and she labored over the lunches and dinners the doctor came to share with her. It grew to be a daily custom. Breakfast the physician had at an early hour at his hotel, and then was off to his clinics and his calls. Zelda did not see him until one o'clock when he arrived for luncheon. In an effort to please him, she strove to make these repasts as delectable as she could, and surprised even herself with her success. The doctor was ecstatic in his praise and added to these feasts candy, nuts, cheese or wine; he never appeared without some delicacy to grace the table, and brought often a present for the cook besides,—a pair of silk stockings, a bracelet, a book. Each week he left a twenty-dollar gold piece on the corner of Zelda's table. She kissed him now when he came and went,—the humble adoration in his eyes softened her heart. He was "a kind of simple creature after all," she told herself.

"The hidden princess in the tower," Boylston first used the phrase. She had rather liked it, though it had its price. She was the sole person who dwelt in the barracky building. No one guessed anyone lived there except old Mrs. Hobbs, the charwoman who cleaned the doctor's quarters in the evening, and was secrecy itself,—a dear, faithful character devoted to Zelda and the physician.

"The hidden princess in the tower." The expression

was romantic, it appealed to the girl's imagination, but it was lonely, the kind of loneliness any princess in a tower might expect. . . . As she stood between the Nottingham lace curtains at her window and gazed down upon the web and woof of Market Street's endlessly weaving traffic, she often fancied herself an unhappy princess gazing from a turreted casement. Life was a disappointment, life was barren, empty, a failure. Hers was at any rate. She was a prisoner in her tower, her means of livelihood dependent upon a man's whim; if she offended him he had but to turn her into the street; it behooved her to be pleasant and entertaining.

§ 3

On this particular March afternoon Zelda found herself wondering for the first time, coldly and judiciously, what the future held for her. The past three months she had been drifting, an aimless progression from one day to another. Michael had occupied her mind, all her thoughts had been of him, her sick heart had longed for him, his voice, his touch, his loving arms. Never once had she dared to hope that they might be reunited. Every circumstance had been against it but more than circumstances, she had been balked by the knowledge of Michael himself. Love her though he did, he dared not oppose his mother,—that she knew,—and Mrs. Kirk would do her best to persuade him to think lightly of the girl who had been banished from her own home. Michael was lost to her. He was gone, of the past, and only her aching longing remained. . . . And now she was bound to Boylston, bound by gratitude, bound by the favors, by a thousand and one trivial experiences she had shared with him. Her figure stiffened and her small hands shut spasmodically. It came to her suddenly how decidedly she was bound.

Well-l. . . . What of it? . . . She liked him well enough. . . . He was a "simple creature after all."

But such indeterminate conclusions did not make the future any plainer. The thought of the doctor as a lover was repellent, but she *was* grateful, and she had a real wish in her heart to do something generous to repay him for all his kindness.

Opening the door behind her, he came in now from his office. He never knocked any more; further evidence, flashed Zelda's thoughts, of the growing bond between them. He was in great spirits and was rubbing the heels of his clasped palms together in characteristic fashion. His forgotten stethoscope dangled from his neck and there was about him a faint odor of carbolic acid.

"Well, my Zelda-poppy, how goes it? Last patient gone and I've an appointment cancelled. Looks as if the rest of the afternoon was free. I've a good mind to lock the door and put out the sign."

He came to her at the window and put his arm about her. Inwardly she shrank at the touch, but she did not move. "Lord," he continued impulsively, "you're the loveliest creature God ever made, know that?" He drew her against him and she lifted her cheek to his kiss. "Yes, sir, the loveliest creature God ever made. My dear, just knowing you are here on the other side of that door, makes all the difference in the world to me, while I'm at work in my dusty office. It's wonderful to realize that all I have to do is to open that door, walk in and take you in my arms."

She said nothing, and after a moment he put his other arm around her, drawing her to him. The metal of the stethoscope hurt her chin as he pressed her against him and the carbolic acid smell was strong and sickening. His clothes, his black cutaway, his wrinkled, slightly soiled, white vest, rubbed about the pocket where he kept his notebook and gold pencil, his flat cravat polka-dotted in light blue, his winged collar, his shirt, trousers, all the garments he wore suddenly obtruded themselves oddly, grossly, upon her conscious-

ness. She looked up at him. His eyes glistened behind the lenses of his glasses from a corner of which dangled the little gold chain looped over his ear; she observed the dimple in his chin and the tiny patch of stubble in its centre that had escaped his razor; his lips were thick and red and his large teeth shone wetly between them as he smiled down upon her. Involuntarily she pushed herself loose from his arms and turned back to the window. Revulsion; she tried to hide it. He seemed at the moment to be overpowering,—some strange, middle-aged man whom she had never seen before. She heard him sit down heavily in a chair behind her, and for a little while she stood gazing from the window. There he was, Doctor Boylston, sitting in the armchair behind her in the little suite he had furnished for her, his chair, his suite and everything in it, including herself, his. Distaste and weariness swept over her; her thoughts roamed. Ginger! . . . Ginger at least was her own. . . . She turned to see if the kitten was still asleep on the foot of the bed. . . . Boylston sat slumped in the chair, a hand on either arm, his head sunk against his chest. She looked at him; a wave of pity welled up in her. She went to him and gently touched his hair, but he made no move. After a moment she took one of his large hands in hers and seated herself on the chair's arm.

"You're very good to me, Doctor," she said, "and I *do* appreciate all you've done for me."

He shook his head, frowning.

"Gratitude," he said; "I don't want gratitude. I want something more than that."

"I give you all I can."

"Humph," he grunted and there was a significant pause.

"Oh, come," Zelda said impatiently, "I don't like to see you scowling that way." She leaned over and kissed him, and at once he took her in his arms, gazing upon her upturned face as she lay in their enfolding circle.

She could see the blue veins swell in his forehead, his pulse beating in his temples.

"God, I love you," he said tensely; "why can't you love me?"

She wriggled free.

"How about to-night? What shall we do?" she asked brusquely. She began to hum and straighten her hair before the mirror. In the glass she could see him watching her.

"Come along now," she said in mild reproach. "Shall we go to Tortoni's, the Poodle Dog, or shall we dine here?" She outlined an appetizing meal she would prepare for him.

"I'll go and see what's in the ice box," she finished, and disappeared to investigate her tiny larder. She was gone five or six minutes. When she returned Boylston had sunk forward with his head in his hands, his glasses swinging from the gold chain about his ears, the stethoscope dangling ridiculously from about his neck. His attitude was tragically abject. Dropping on her knees before him, she took away his hands from before his face and found, as she suspected, his cheeks were wet.

"Doctor!"

"Oh, don't bother about me, Zelda."

"But, Doctor . . ."

"Nothing but an old duffer."

"Don't say that."

"I'm old—old—old, Zelda,—too old for the likes of you."

She patted his hands.

"You love that cat?" he demanded, indicating the white ball of fluff on the bed.

"Oh, you know I do. You gave her to me: I love you both."

"She's your pet, isn't she?" he pursued.

Zelda nodded.

"Did you never wish that that kitten, when you were stroking her and petting her would suddenly turn

round and stroke and pet you, kiss you maybe, and learn to love you as you love her?"

She did not answer. She sat at his feet and looked up into his blotched face, his shining eyes with their lashes all wetly stuck together, and the wave of pity smote her again.

"Well, that's the way I feel about you," he finished. "You're just my pet, Zelda, my pet, and I would to God you could learn to love me a little."

"But I do," Zelda said, very low.

"But not the way I want. You know that."

A moment's silence. Then the girl rose and deliberately got back into his arms, giving herself to his eager embrace, and his hot, thick kisses. The stethoscope was hidden between their breasts.

A few minutes later she enticed him into the living room where she made him sit down on the couch. From there he contentedly watched her as she came and went, in and out of her diminutive kitchen, setting the small round table for their *tête-à-tête* dinner. His eyes never left her, and although she gave no sign there was not a moment when she was not conscious of his regard, and was not displeased.

§ 4

"Good night, Zelda."

"Good night, Doctor."

"Can't you call me Ralph?"

"I never think of you that way."

"Well, can't you try?"

"Yes; I'll try, but it seems fresh of me. . . . I don't know. . . . I seem . . ." She was going to say "too young."

He smiled and drew her closer.

"We've had a wonderful evening, haven't we? That was a marvellous feast you got up for us. You're a peach. I suppose you know that, my little California poppy."

"Don't be an old sil," she rebuked him.

"But you *are,* you know," he insisted.

"I guess it's all right if you think so."

"Are you happy?"

She shrugged and smiled non commitally.

"You make *me* very happy," he went on, "I think of nothing else but you all day and I try to think of things that will please you."

"Well, you succeed."

"Zelda!" He slipped an arm about her. She let him enfold her. She could hear his heart beating as she rested her head against his breast.

"Zelda! Zelda!"

"You'd better go home, now," she said, pushing him from her.

"Some time I needn't?"

She shook her head.

"Some night you'll say yes," he persisted.

Her head still refused.

"Well, good night."

"Good night."

"You *do* love me a little?"

"A little."

"And some day you're going to love me more, Zelda-poppy?"

"I hope so."

"Kiss me."

Once more she surrendered herself to his hug. Clapping on his Derby in order to free his hand, he strained her to him, burying his lips in her hair. When he released her, the hat was cocked at an angle on top of his head. He looked ridiculous.

"Good night, my darling."

"Good night."

"Darling poppy."

"Good night."

"Some day you'll let me stay?"

"Good night."

She shut the door softly, turning the metal knob in the lock that released the spring bolt. She listened to the receding thump of his steps and heard the clatter die away on the stairs. Mechanically she entered the front room and turned the key in the door that connected with the adjoining suite. For a moment she stopped at the window and watched a passing cable car. Few people were abroad; the street was comparatively deserted. She carried the few remaining dishes from the table to the laboratory sink, viewing the disorder there with a frown. It could wait until morning. She hated washing dishes; they were one of her problems, living as she did. . . .

The night was about her. A glare from the street lit up the ceiling of her room and a street lamp dimly patterned the aperture of the window upon the white plaster. The furniture in the room stood about her like ghostly sentinels. . . . Silence. . . . Behind her, above, below, pressed the vast emptiness of the vacant building. No single living soul was in it. If spirits *did* exist, such a desolate, untenanted building would be the very place they would choose to manifest themselves. She thought of all the men who had carried on their affairs in that ramshackled old frame structure; she could see them bending over their desks, tilting back in their swivel chairs. Some of them had come there every day since the building was built, twenty, thirty years ago. Now many of them were gone, but how probable, should they return, how probable it would be for them to choose to visit their accustomed desks and familiar chairs. . . . Dead men seeking the environment they had known best on earth. . . . Dead men floating silently through the halls. This suite had once been a doctor's office. Had he died? And his predecessor? Was he dead, too? And did they meet here and tell each other what scenes of sorrow and of pain these rooms had known during their tenancies?

Zelda moaned, put her arm around the kitten and placed her lips against its white fur.

Wheeling thoughts. She shut out the fancies and her mind turned back to Boylston. He was kind to her, he was good to her, he loved her. The feel and aspect of his odd clothes, the wrinkled white vest, a trifle soiled about the pockets. . . . Pathetic. . . . Old. . . . She remembered his thin hair. . . .

Memories of Michael,—Michael, shy, grinning, his blue eyes shut to slits when he smiled or laughed. She thought of his strong young arms about her, his clean, fresh, ardent lips. . . . Hot tears burned her eyeballs and trickled across her nose.

"Michael."

The dead building loomed around her, walls and walls and walls, empty, deserted.

A sigh close to her ear, a shuffling, stealthy tread just outside of the door, a hand fumbling for the knob.

She screamed, sitting bolt upright, her hands pressed to her thundering heart.

"Doctor—Doctor—Doctor," she called.

Silence. The kitten, disturbed, started to scramble past her. Zelda caught its wriggling body and carried it against her breast. Silence. Nothing but the blackness and emptiness of the vacant rooms and halls. She seemed so tiny, so insignificant,—a frightened little girl alone in a vast building.

§ 5

On her eighteenth birthday, Boylston took her to dinner in a private room at the Poodle Dog and Zelda tasted champagne for the first time in her life. He was very expansive and affectionate. He gave her a gold watch, and a gold pin in the form of a bow-knot of ribbon, and this, with the watch suspended from it, he pinned to her silk blouse. He also gave her a handful of bright twenty-dollar gold pieces to spend for anything she fancied,—some pretty clothes and gewgaws.

She was her own mistress now, he told her; she could come and go as she pleased; her uncle no longer had any jurisdiction over her.

That night he stayed with her until morning on the promise that he would not touch her. He kept his word and they talked intimately until the early hours. A few nights later he again persuaded her to the arrangement, but the third time she capitulated to him and in the morning hated and despised herself. All day she sat with twisting fingers and staring eyes, tears streaking her cheeks. She felt degraded, defiled.

"Oh, Michael, Michael, Michael,—how could I? . . . How could I be so vile, so unworthy, so unfaithful to our love and to our union?"

CHAPTER VI

§ 1

San Francisco, a city of hills, up and down which scrambled rows of gimcrack, ornate frame houses of reds and browns and whites, and over which crawled trundling cable cars, clanging bells. This was the city of the late nineties. Market Street slashed the huddle diagonally with a long straight finger which pointed from the ferries at one end to The Twin Peaks at the other. Across this broad thoroughfare substantial brick and stone mercantile establishments of incongruous heights faced one another and alternating with wooden fronts where meat and vegetables were sold, saloons, dives and shooting galleries thrived, freak shows advertised, a gambling house, the Café Royal, openly plied its trade, drug stores, cash stores, cheap stores, flourished and prospered.

Dust, chaff, gusty winds laden with the chill of fog, surging tides of pedestrians eager to escape the gritty blasts, the tang of the salt sea in the squally airs, the clopping of huge fetlocked teams dragging heavy drays, the brisk clacking of nimbler hoofs, clanging bells, crowding, hurry-skurry, dirt, grayness, drabness, ugliness,—these were Zelda's impressions of her days when she lived in the Fuller Building. She did not feel that way about them at the time; it was only afterwards that she appreciated how drear they were, how unlovely and uninteresting.

She did not rise in the mornings until ten o'clock and trailed about her small domain preparing breakfast in a lace-trimmed light blue satin wrapper that grew foul and torn about the bottom. She had learned from

the doctor to smoke cigarettes, and now she always reached for a "pill" as soon as she awoke. After she and Boylston had lived together nearly two years, all the novelty, all the piquancy of the relationship, had departed, for Zelda at least. He still loved her, pursued her, plagued her, but he had never been attractive to her and at times she hated him. All his moods were familiar to her now. She tolerated him, nothing more. Her interest in him had come to be measured by his generosity, by what he gave her, and little by little she found herself playing up to him in order to coax from him an extra largess. Once, at an early stage, she had despised herself for this meanness, but she was rapidly becoming hardened. She resented the condition of life in which she found herself; she resented Boylston's hold on her; she resented Boylston. They quarreled. She never gave in. She knew he would make the first overtures toward reconciliation and in the end would concede to her whatever she had asked. Often she felt sorry for him. His dread of approaching age was pathetic; he wanted desperately to remain young and would exert himself in the most ridiculous ways to keep pace with her own vigorous vitality.

§ 2

Just before Christmas, the second year, Boylston had a very narrow escape from death. While operating, his hand became infected and rapid blood poisoning ensued. A day went by before Zelda had the news, and when it reached her there were grave doubts of his recovery. He finally asked that she be sent for, but when she reached the hospital she was not allowed to see him. In the stuffy little parlor on the ground floor, she was obliged to wait for several anxious hours. Sharing this vigil with her were two other women, a plump, and a thin one, Mrs. Hodgson and Miss Boylston,

a sister and cousin of the stricken man, hovering between life and death upstairs. They, too, had just been notified and had arrived that morning from Stockton, where they lived. Zelda's presence was clearly not understood Mrs. Hodgson asked:

"You're his office nurse, Miss Marsh?"

"No, just a friend," Zelda answered self-consciously.

After that the prim conversation of the two women included the girl as little as possible. During the long trying ordeal Zelda began to appreciate for the first time the uncertainty of her position.

Hers was not the type of mind to think of herself as the doctor's "mistress." The daughter of Joe Marsh, proprietor of the Gastronomic Hotel, one time neighbor of Bakersfield's "Spanish town," regarded herself as "kept."

Kept! It had never been brought home to her in quite that way before. . . . And if Boylston died, what would become of her?

That thought like the wheels in a squirrel's cage went round and round in her brain during the anxious hours she spent on the edge of the little narrow sofa in the hideous hospital parlor.

What would become of her? . . . What would become of her? . . .

But it was she and not his relatives whom the sick man asked first to see when the tide turned. Zelda was shocked by the great change the few days illness had made in him.

"Little Zelda, little Zelda-poppy, 're you glad your old duffer pulled through?"

There was small strength in the voice, hardly more than a feeble whisper.

In the course of the day she faced the two women across his bed.

"My fiancée," whispered the sick man, introducing her; "she and I 're going to be married soon as I'm round again."

It was a question what Boylston should do and where he should go when he quitted the hospital. He wanted Zelda with him; the dingy quarters in the Fuller Building were no proper place for a man fighting back to health and strength; taking her to a hotel, or to a winter resort would expose him to recognition and he had a mortal fear of gossip. A fellow doctor, who was in his confidence, offered a week-end refuge of his own as an asylum. This was no more nor less than an abandoned horse car that had been remodelled into a sort of cottage or hut. It had been hauled to a spot on the far outskirts of the city and dumped on the sand at the brink of a cliff overlooking the Pacific. Some score of these abandoned horse cars were grouped here and the little settlement was known as Carville. Their microscopic interiors had been transformed into sleeping quarters,—they were hardly more than that,—two bunks, a chair, a table, and a rusty, air-tight stove with a crazy stovepipe that careened at an angle through the roof.

Zelda was transported with enthusiasm over the place from the first glance. Doctor Boylston's friend had driven them out in his buggy to look at it on the first day the convalescing man was able to make the trip. The puffy narrow-gauge steam train that wound its way out to the Cliff House passed no closer than three-quarters of a mile to Carville, and the spot could be reached only by a tramp of twice that distance from the nearest station where the train stopped. There was neither path nor road. To get to it meant a weary plodding through deep white sand. But Zelda was enchanted.

"Oh, let me, let me, let me, Doctor," she pleaded. "I'll take the best care of you. It's a divine spot to get well in, and I'll wait on you hand and foot!"

"But, my dear, there's not a soul here at present. You'd get frightfully lonesome, and suppose something should happen?"

"Nothing's going to happen."

"But how about supplies and food?"

"Leave that to me. I'll go in to the city every day if necessary, and I'm sure if I give Bibo a big enough order he'll deliver out here."

She had her way. The doctor-friend had been dubious, but Boylston thought it no harm to try the experiment. Three weeks' rest would be all he needed to set him on his feet again. Three weeks were not such a serious matter. So the adventure was decided upon, and one bright sunny morning the buggy again wound its way across the waste, the white sand drifting in veils from its slowly turning wheels, and deposited Zelda and the convalescent in the deserted streets of Carville.

From the very first, Nature seemed to turn a bright, approving face upon the experiment. February came and with it one of those wonderful early California springs when no trace of fog shadowed the sea, when the heavens were blue by day and star-strewn by night, when a gracious sun spilled warmth upon a joyous land which gave forth in grateful response yellow poppies, blue lupins and wild asters.

In the mornings, clad only in her flimsy nightgown, Zelda came to the narrow sliding door of the tiny abode, and with arms flung wide and an ecstatic laugh in her throat, drank deep of the transcendental beauty before her, filling her lungs with the soft fragrance that scented the warm air.

Thirty feet from where she stood, the cliff fell abruptly away to a sheltered beach guarded on its landward side by steep ramparts that buttressed it; all day and all night the waves of the Pacific caressed the sandy shore, rolling in in threatening combers, crashing thunderously, then flattening themselves out harmlessly, fanlike, upon the reach of sand. Beyond stretched the untrammeled surface of the ocean, broken now and again by a trail of smoke or a square of canvas sail. The Golden Gate was to the distant right, the squat old red-brick fort balancing the craggy headlands of Point Reyes across the straits. Far out

on the horizon loomed the gray shapes of the Farallones.

Carville sprawled, higgledy-piggledy, in the sand. A charm clung to the little settlement; horse cars, liberated forever from trundling after jogging nags, seemed to settle comfortably in this alien environment as though conscious that the jarring and the bouncing were over forever more. Each boasted some adornment. A porch graced one, blown and tattered nasturtiums clustered about another's base, conches and smooth beach rocks marked paths and garden beds, and from their shallow eaves dangled strings of sea-urchin shells, and the white skeletons of horseshoe crabs. All these crazy huts that spoke of love and care and happy holidays were tenantless now. No one came to disturb the peace and beauty that wrapped and soothed the doctor and his companion. Beyond the shacks of Carville no other dwelling was in sight. The puffing train three-quarters of a mile away reminded them occasionally that a world lay beyond their paradise. Lupin and poppy splashed the rolling sandy knolls and hollows with vivid tints of blue and orange. Birds flittered and chirped, there was a great fluttering of wings, larks carolled joyously in the early hours of the day and gulls soared silently, wheeling, dipping, watchful. Toward noon a warm hush descended upon the land while above the sound and wash of the sea came the hum of insects in the sedge and mallow. Peace—beauty—peace.

Zelda liked best to scramble down the eroded face of the cliff to the white beach below. Her beach. She loved each granule of sand that comprised it. No prying eyes ever peeped into its privacy. She felt it was hers, hers alone. Every stranded log, every tangle of seaweed, every collection of cocoanut shells, straw bottles, and ocean flotsam, were her private property. She went wading in the surf and built sand forts. Once she took off her clothes and braved the breakers, but the water was too cruelly cold, and Doctor Boylston,

keeping guard and watching her performance from the edge of the cliff above, had been frightened out of his wits, fearing, since she did not know how to swim, she might be drowned.

At either end of the beach, black, volcanic masses of rock, drenched by the sea and for the most part covered at high tide, reared out of the water and piled themselves against the foot of the cliff. These were Zelda's hunting grounds. The waves flung themselves furiously against them but except when the tide was highest she could wander over them without fear of a wetting. Where tumbled boulders shouldered one another, deep chasms and dark caverns yawned, into which the sea plunged and surged. Zelda would gaze in awe down upon these slashing, rioting turbulences. But there were hollows, deep pockets between the rocks, worn basins in their surfaces, which were her fondest diversion and joy. Each one held a natural aquarium in which crabs scuttled sidewise into crevices, starfish spread their red feelers, sea urchins waved their purple spines, mussels clustered in horny patches, anemones bloomed in green and gorgeous opulence, and strange, leggy and clawlike things, their shelly houses on their backs, moved with slow deliberation upon their mysterious enterprises. Squatting on her heels, the girl watched the drama of these pools for hours at a time, lost in fascination.

She was always up with the sun. From the doorway of their crazy lodging, she drew in the first deep breath of fragrant morning air, and then, in slippers and wrapper, her thick, tawny hair cascading down her back, made her way to the little grill behind the horse car, started a fire of sticks which in a moment or two was briskly crackling underneath the coffee pot. Breakfast, presently, she carried to the doctor and set on a chair beside his bed. She usually curled herself at the foot of his narrow bunk and shared coffee and eggs with him. Gossip, talk and general shilly-shallying followed for an hour or more.

On certain detestable days she had to tramp to the railroad station, go into the city, and bring back a heavy load of supplies. Usually, the whole glorious, warm sunshiny day stretched before her. Boylston dressed leisurely while she started her preparations for lunch and dinner. She liked to have these as much out of the way as possible it gave her more time for her beach and her rocks. The doctor was steadily but slowly regaining his strength. By midmorning he was into his clothes and had established himself near the edge of the cliff in an old dilapidated, wicker rocking chair, from which he could watch Zelda scramble down to her beloved hunting ground, and there, run about, skirting the edge of waves, digging, investigating, jumping from rock to rock, or remaining wrapped for half an hour or more in the study of some marine mystery at the bottom of a pool.

Toward noon she would clamber up to him, panting, excited, bringing each time a new curiosity or treasure. Lunch followed, usually a simple repast, after which they would wander along the brow of the cliff. The doctor had still to choose his steps, so that they did not go far. It was the most delightful, the most beguiling part of the day for the man. The hour was warm, a shimmer of heat was faintly discernible amidst the sedge, insects zummed and chirped contentedly in their hiding places. There was a mingled fragrance of wild flowers and salt sea in the air, the ocean gently heaved and sank, and the lazy waves curled leisurely over, crashed in a thunderous splather of foam, slid noiselessly up the sandy beach, and trickled complainingly back, with a steady, rhythmic cadence.

§ 3

It was during these days of happy companionship that Boylston urged Zelda to marry him. He talked very persuasively about it. She ought to be his wife, he told her; she had earned a right to his name; what

would become of her if he should happen to die? It might be advisable to keep the marriage secret, however. If it became known he had a wife, his practice would suffer. Zelda did not quite understand why this should be but presumably women, certain types, liked their attending physician unmarried. Evidently Doctor Boylston was considered attractive. She studied him curiously with this thought in mind; his looks had lost all significance to her; she could not tell whether he had a pleasing appearance or not. Once she remembered she had regarded him as handsome.

Handsome or otherwise, she did not want to marry him. Physically he repelled her. He was too old. She did not want an old man for a husband. The point he stressed, the necessity for a secret marriage, destroyed the only reason why she was willing to consider it. To be "Mrs. Ralph Boylston," and take her place as the doctor's wife among the ladies who lived at the California Hotel rather appealed to her. She would have enjoyed snubbing his sister and cousin. If she were to continue to reside in the depressing, stodgy rooms of the Fuller Building, and it was not to be known that she had married the doctor, there would be small advantage in becoming his wife.

So she sniffed and shrugged her shoulders, when Boylston discussed the matter, answered him evasively and escaped as soon as she could to her domain of exploration and rocky scrambles.

§ 4

The last days were spent in the wildest scrambles of all. No longer was she afraid of the hissing foam that sometimes bore up swiftly about her feet, drenching her to the ankle, to the knee, no longer was she afraid to leap to a wet and slippery ledge, or scale an almost perpendicular height. It was thrilling to venture out over the rocks into the thundering surf as far

as possible, springing from one ridge to another and making a quick dash across a momentarily drained channel, shrieking wildly as the water in another instant roared around the base of her refuge, flinging up frothy hands in efforts to reach her. She liked to stand on the crest of some giant boulder and gaze seaward into the face of the stiff ocean breeze that whipped her hair from her forehead and strained her thin garments from legs and arms like fluttering flags. She liked to sing and shout into the teeth of this wind and feel the sound snatched from her lips to be instantly drowned in the plunge and roar of the breakers.

One day she decided to investigate what lay beyond the volcanic black mass of rocks that ramparted one end of her beach. It was a glorious adventure, at moments appallingly dangerous when a misstep would have hurled her to rocks below and the bludgeoning blows of a thrashing tide.

At the end of her reconnoitering, another beach unfolded itself, a long sandy curve a mile or more in length, ragged and windswept, by no means as beautiful, intimate nor protected as the one she regarded as her own.

Here, she came upon a man in a shabby corduroy coat painting on a square canvas fixed against the rocks, a slouch hat pulled over his eyes. He heard the clatter of dislodged pebbles behind him, turned, and she found herself looking straight into the eyes of Michael Kirk.

They stared at one another a moment and then came his quick, grinning smile of recognition, his face wrinkling in the old characteristic, winning way.

"Hello!"

Zelda's heart leaped in her breast, and stopped.

"Michael!" She swallowed with effort, her throat small and tight, and pressed her hand hard against her breast.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

"Over there, beyond the rocks."

Her heart was thundering now, the blood rushing to face and head.

"You?"

"I was painting a bit; I've taken up oils, now."

"Do you come here often?"

"For the past two or three days, that's all. The weather's been glorious, hasn't it?"

They talked at random, eager to avoid a pause.

"Let me see what you're doing? . . . Oh, it's nice, isn't it? . . . I like it. You've got those wet, glistening rocks splendidly . . . and the reflections there in the wet sand."

"How do you happen to be out here? It's a good three miles from the city."

She saw him take in her costume, the simple cotton dress, torn here and there, the tennis shoes; his eyes found her uncovered head.

Questions—questions; her clamoring heart told her he must not ask them.

The stiff wind at her back whipped her skirt about her and lashed strands of hair across her face. The waves mounted in great rising walls, curved, tipped, thundered in crashing arcs and foamed over the rocks, spouting back into the sea in gushing, gurgling streams. Above the uproar, it was difficult to hear. They had to shout at one another.

"Come down off these rocks," Michael suggested. "The beach is only a step; there is a sheltered sort of a cave there where we can talk. . . ."

"I can't. I have to go back." She must not continue this, she ought to go, she ought to hurry back. Any excuse, so only to escape. . . . This was madness! . . . She must stop. . . .

He led her out of the wind. The touch of his fingers was like flame. . . . Oh, she had thought this was all over, she had thought she was cured, and now she was deliberately rekindling old fires!

"Zelda . . ."

"Yes?"

"What happened to you? You disappeared as if the earth had swallowed you?"

"Tell me about yourself; news about me can wait." Anything to divert him; there were no questions she could answer.

"Things are about the same; still going to art school."

"Do you like it as much as ever?"

"Sur-re. Mother's talking about taking me to Paris next year."

"How is your mother?"

"Oh, she's fine."

"You're living in the same place."

"Oh, sur-re. Guess we'll stay there always."

A pause that grew into a silence embarrassed them. Their glances met, quickly parted, joined again. To hide a sudden trembling, Zelda stooped and pretended to be interested in a bit of shell she picked up at her feet.

"What'd you find?"

"Oh, nothing."

He bent near her, the better to see. Proximity quickened their pulses; they felt each other's nearness; their hands touched.

"Gee, Zelda . . ." he began boyishly.

"Yes?"

"Gee, I've missed you."

"Have you, Michael?"

"Do you ever think about me any more?"

"Do you ever think of *me*?"

"How can you ask such a question?"

"Well, I didn't know."

"What happened to you, Zelda? What did they do to you?"

"Uncle wanted to lock me up, send me to an institution."

"He didn't!"

"Oh, yes. I wouldn't go, so I climbed down the ladder——"

"The old ladder we used to use?"

"Yes,—and ran away."

"Where did you go?"

"Oh, I went to a friend, a girl I knew at school."

"And what's happened to you since then?"

"Oh, I got a job, I work. Oh, don't let's talk about me! Tell me something about yourself."

"There isn't anything to tell. I'm just going to school same as I used to. . . . I often think about old times, Zelda."

"Do you?"

"Gee, Zelda, there's never been anybody that's taken your place!"

She looked up at him and a wave of dizzying emotion engulfed her.

"Well, there's never been anybody that's taken yours," she whispered; "not here," she added, her hand upon her heart.

Again their eyes met and this time did not falter. Slowly as if some outside power pulled them toward each other, they drew near, their arms went round each other, their lips met. Waves of ecstasy poured through Zelda, the world reeled about her, the bright heavens were blurred in a dazzling mist. She clung to Michael desperately and they kissed hungrily, devouringly.

"Dearest, dearest, dearest," he whispered.

"My darling," she whispered back, her eyelashes fluttering.

"God, Zelda, you're the most beautiful girl in the world."

"We never, never should have parted, Michael. You and I should have married and let others make the best of it."

"We couldn't; I couldn't. I wasn't of age, and

Mother would have stopped us. She could have had the marriage annulled."

"But now, Michael?" She breathed the words, her hands about his neck, her fingers in his hair.

"Now?"

"Yes, now. . . . We could get married now!"

"Dearest, I'd like to, but you know I haven't a cent."

"What do we care about money!"

"Oh, I guess we don't."

"Couldn't you get a job on a newspaper as an artist or something?"

"Sur-re, I guess so."

"Oh, Michael, Michael," she burst out, straining him to her, kissing him almost roughly. "I can't give you up again, I can't, I can't!"

He grinned at her, his whole face creased with happy wrinkles.

"Ah, gee, Zelda,—gee, I love you."

"Do you? Well, then, say so,—say so,—tell me a thousand times you do!"

"I've never stopped loving you, there's never been any other girl in my life but you. There've been others, you know, but never like you."

"Well, let's get married and run away together, let's get away from everybody."

"Sur-re, let's."

"You can get a job on some paper, Michael?"

"Guess so; I can try, anyhow."

"Whatever happens, Michael, let's not be separated again."

"No, let's stick together. . . . Ah, Zelda, you're wonderful! We'll get married and tell Mother afterwards."

"Yes, we'll tell her afterwards."

"You're beautiful!"

Arms and lips again. Passion flamed between them like fire.

"Where do you live, Zelda? Not 'way out here?"

"Oh, no; I just happened to be staying with some friends, that's all. They have a cabin in the sand dunes and I—I happened to take a scramble over the rocks this morning, that's all. I wanted to see what was round this point."

"Well, it was lucky you did. Guess I'd never 've seen you otherwise. You'd never have let me hear from you, I suppose, if we hadn't happened to meet."

"No, I don't think I would."

"Why not? Didn't you know I'd be crazy to see you again?"

"I've told you why."

"Ah, well, I don't understand."

His face grew cloudy. She stepped away.

"I have to be going back," she said dully.

"Oh, *no*."

"I must. I can't stay a minute longer. . . . They . . . they'll think something has happened to me."

"I'll go back with you."

"No, that won't do. I must go back alone."

"When shall I see you again?"

"Well . . ."

"To-morrow?"

"All right, to-morrow."

"Here?" She assented.

"About this time?"

"About this time . . . Michael!"

"Yes, dear?"

"Do you truly love me?"

"How can you ask?"

"Well, say it then; you don't *say* it!"

"But I do: you know I love you. . . . Do you love me?"

Her smile and reproachful head-shake answered him.

He caught her once more, his arms about her, hers around him; they kissed and kissed again.

Holding her from him a moment, he searched her face.

"Anybody else but me, Zelda?"

"Nobody."

"You've loved me just the way I've loved you?"

"Just the way you've loved me."

"You don't say it as though it were really so!"

"Don't I? . . . Well, it's true, Michael. There's nobody I'll ever love as I love you."

"Sweetheart!"

"I really must go now. Do make it easy for me, Michael."

"You'll be here to-morrow?"

"Positively."

"I'll be waiting for you. . . . One more, *please*."

§ 5

Boom — c-c-crash — splisch! Boom — c-c-crash — splisch!

The tireless surf pounded all through the night. The wind whistled and jerked covetously at the little horse car squatting in the sand. Boylston, stretched on his narrow couch, cz-z-z-z-z-ed and snuffled through his nose during all the dreary wakeful hours.

"Anybody else but me? . . . You've loved me just the way I've loved you?"

She could hear the inflections of Michael's voice, hear his words and see his wrinkled eager look and feel his young arms about her, muscular arms firm and hard and strong. . . . Oh God!

He must never know, never, never. No, she could not hurt him, and she knew that would. He was still young and clean, and she was coarsened, and degraded. . . . Oh, the foulness of those dingy rooms in the Fuller Building!

Boylston would never let her go; he would pursue her and tell on her. . . . But she didn't want to deceive

Michael; she couldn't go to him with a lie on her lips. . . . No, if she went at all, she would tell him herself. . . . But not Michael, not eager, loving, trusting Michael with his faith and his young illusions. . . . She couldn't hurt him and hurt his love. . . . What to do? What *could* she do?

Boom — c-c-crash — splisch! Boom — c-c-crash — splisch!

What time was it? Four o'clock. The wind whined and whipped itself about the corners of the little car. The hut shook and trembled. She could hear the stinging impact of blown sand against the windows. . . . Was the night ever to end?

Michael—Boylston, Boylston—Michael. She loved one, she hated the other. . . . How she hated him! She hated his very soul! . . . His hold on her. . . . Captive. . . . The princess in the tower! . . . A sorry princess truly!

But what mattered Boylston? She knew she had the strength and courage to quit him in the twinkling of an eye were she so minded. She had only contempt for him; no fear. But quit him for what? . . . Not Michael, not trusting Michael! She argued, debated, twisting, turning, panting eventually from sheer exhaustion. She could not bring herself to do it, she couldn't confess to him her shame.

Boom — c-c-crash — splisch! Boom — c-c-crash — splisch! . . . Cz-z-z-z-z—snuffle—snuffle—snuffle.

What time was it? Quarter past four. . . . The wind sobbed and sank to silence, then leaped to life with a wild scream and went shrieking, laughing, rioting across the flat, rolling dunes.

§ 6

"Doctor, I think we'd better break up to-day. It's quite stormy. We can send after our heavy things when it clears."

"What time is it, dearie?"

"'Bout half past seven. I can't get the fire started in the grill; the wind's too strong. I'm going to try the stove in here. . . ."

"You look tired, Zelda-poppy."

"I had a bad night."

"You don't feel sick, do you?"

"No; just the wind kept me awake. I couldn't sleep."

"How long did you lie awake?"

"All night, I guess."

"Zelda!"

"Oh, please don't bother me. I'm tired of it out here. I want to go home."

Boylston knelt on his narrow couch, and through the square of window above his bunk looked seaward.

"I think it's going to break. There aren't any clouds. Just a sort of stiff blow that will blow itself out. The waves are piling up gloriously. By to-morrow they ought to be tremendous. Are you sure you want to go in to-day? It will be quite spectacular out here, the surf I mean. Why not stay till to-morrow? That will be Friday and we can have Saturday and Sunday to straighten things out. Monday I can pick up office work again."

No answer.

"You sure you don't want to stay till to-morrow?"

Zelda scraped at the cold fire box of the pot-bellied little stove with a bent poker. The dead cold ashes rose in a fluffy cloud, stinging eyes, choking throat.

"Why go to-day, Zelda? I think it would be mighty interesting to stay and watch the breakers."

She rose suddenly, flinging the half-filled coffee pot to the floor and striking savagely with the iron poker at the stove.

"Because I'm going to-day, y'understand," she cried furiously, "because I'm going to-day—*to-day!* . . . I'm not going to stay here any longer 'an I can help. I'm going this morning. . . . I'm going just as soon as

I can pack a few things together, and if you don't want to come with me, you can stay behind! Oh, I *hate* this place! I wish to God I'd never come here!"

"Why, Zelda! Zelda! . . . What *is* it? You aren't well! What's the matter, dearie? What's troubling my little Zelda-poppy?"

She stood blazing at him a moment, the poker gripped in her hand. Then she flung it from her and sank to her knees, burying her face in her hands.

"Darling—darling,—what is it?"

He came to her and touched her shoulder caressingly.

"Leave me alone!" she screamed at him. "Leave me alone! . . . If you lay a finger on me I'll *kill* you."

CHAPTER VII

§ 1

The Fuller Building again, with its echoing tramp of feet in the halls and the reverberating clap and jar of closing glass-panelled doors. At night the yawning emptiness of deserted offices and corridors, except when Boylston remained,—nights infinitely more hideous and horrible than those in which loneliness and creeping terrors kept Zelda company.

The dreary routine of her days recommenced. She awoke at ten, trailed about in a soiled wrapper, preparing coffee and toast smeared with jam. These she carried into her bedroom on a tray because the one window there admitted a bit of sun on fogless days. She lingered for an hour or more over her breakfast while she smoked cigarettes and read the morning paper. Boylston did not come to lunch any more. Zelda told him flatly that getting it was too much trouble. She would be hardly through with her morning nibble before it was time to prepare his lunch. She refused to be bothered. But at night they usually dined together, either at home or in some restaurant.

Noon was at hand before she would seriously bestir herself. She would yawn, stretch, and languidly consider how the day should be spent. For half an hour or more she might stand between the lace curtains at the window, idly watching the traffic, as she weighed the matter. She might contemplate reading a book, taking a bath or doing some sewing. She did not bathe very often. The books she read were always novels of sticky romance or thrilling adventure. She was extremely dex-

terous with her needle but hated the drudgery of sewing. Garments ingeniously planned fired her with enthusiasm at the beginning, and she would work industriously for two or three days, then weeks, months, would go by before they were finished.

By two o'clock she was usually smartly, if flamboyantly dressed and was sauntering down Market Street on her way to a glove-cleaners, a book store, or a shop to purchase some feminine frippery with one of Boylston's golden twenties.

She was a gay little figure as she marched upon her way. She bore herself with a certain smartness and style, carried her head high, and while her clothes were too ribbony and too florid, she wore them well, and the swish of her skirts, silk petticoats rustling, caught men's eyes. Her hats were of the peach-basket variety,—the prevailing style,—and these were usually too large and too red. Of men's stares, frank admiring glances, she was never unaware. She courted them and if her get-up was a trifle conspicuous she felt rewarded by the sensation she created. It stopped there, this challenge to the other sex. Occasionally, she had the unpleasant experience of being accosted, but she had a cool stare that was both effective and disconcerting. She never had any trouble with the sports and roughs who roamed that neighborhood. Many of them she knew by sight, more of them knew her. The Fuller Building was situated on the outer rim of San Francisco's "tenderloin" but it did not trouble Zelda; she had been reared in the shadow of Bakersfield's "Spanish town." Men always interested her; she usually had three or four mild flirtations going on.

By four o'clock in the afternoon the gusty wind from the Heads and the chill fog drove her from the streets. Then came the time of day she enjoyed best. She would carry home a delicacy or pastry of some kind: a devilled crab packed in its red shell, a small hot oyster loaf, a tamale, half a box of éclairs, or perhaps only a pound

of candy. As soon as she reached her apartment, she would take off her clothes, loosen her corsets, let down her hair, kick off her tight shoes, put on slippers and wrapper, and set about getting herself a cup of tea. With her book or sewing she would curl up in the large red plush armchair, Ginger in her lap, and with food and tea beside her, spend the rest of the afternoon in comfortable contentment until Boylston came in upon her through the connecting door from his office. During the first year or so, Zelda had been accustomed to bestir herself much earlier in starting preparations for their dinner, but now she did not take the trouble; more often than not they decided to go out to the Poodle Dog.

Every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon she went to a matinée, either to the Alcazar, where a stock company was playing a weekly change of bill, or to the Orpheum where there was a variety show. She loved the theatre. She knew the personalities of all the actors and actresses of the Alcazar Company, their photographs were tacked to her walls. Her favorites she called by their first names. "Viola has a wonderful part this week,—it's 'The Heart of Maryland,'—and Ernest is too cute for anything." Boylston occasionally gave her complimentary seats for the California, when theatrical companies from the East played there for one or two weeks. He declined, however, to be seen with her. "Too dangerous, my dear," was all he would say, "too dangerous, far, far too dangerous." She did not care whether he accompanied her or not, but she did not relish going alone, sitting alone, trying to amuse herself between acts, and returning alone to her dark and deserted home late at night.

It was the evenings she dreaded, the long, dreary, stupid evenings; they were so dull, Boylston so tiresome. He would come in, rubbing the palms of his clasped hands together in his irritating way, the gold chain from his eye-glasses dangling, the evening newspaper tucked beneath his arm. She had complained of

the carbolic acid smell that enveloped him, and now he doused himself with perfume before coming to her; the combination was sickening. Spreading out his news sheet, he would take her seat, while she went to dress, if they were going out, or to prepare dinner, if they were to remain at home.

"Ah, this is something like," he would say, folding the paper back upon itself, preparing to read, and settling comfortably in the chair, "a good day's job well done, and now a pretty companion for the evening."

She was tired of hearing him say it; sometimes she wanted to scream at him: "*Don't* say it to-night, *please* not to-night." But since her return from the glorious weeks above the beach in tiny Carville she was schooling herself not to care what he did, aggravating or otherwise.

She would make herself as presentable as possible if they were going out; Boylston liked her to look well and she herself loved clothes. There would be an inevitable discussion as to where they should dine: the Poodle Dog, Zinkand's, or Techau's. Of late she had grown to like Zinkand's best; she loved Herr Stärk's music. The dinner would drag itself through a weary hour or two. She was content to prolong it. Back in the isolated apartment of the Fuller Building worse awaited her. A dilemma invariably presented itself: if they lingered over the dinner, Boylston drank too much claret and was certain later to become amorous; if the meal was more or less quickly dispatched, the rest of the evening he bored her by his stodginess, and an interminable recital of his comings and goings.

§ 2

One Saturday night when they entered Zinkand's a little later than usual, Michael was sitting at one of the tables with three other young men about his own age and type, presumably all art students dining together

before going to the theatre. Zelda's heart leaped into her throat. She saw he recognized her, but she was able to avert her eyes in time, and passed him at some little distance, her large flowered hat tipped at an angle to hide her face. Following Boylston to their customary table, she managed to seat herself, draw off her gloves, pick up the menu in its heavy embossed cover, and nod answers to the doctor's suggestions in a usual matter-of-fact way; the lowered brim of her hat concealed the ashen color of her face. Suddenly her eyes began to brim and she felt the tears about to fall. With what composure she could still command, she rose and with a word about the dressing-room, left in its direction. Once there she could breathe deeply and nerve herself to the ordeal before her.

Throughout the dreadful hour, she kept her glance resolutely away from Michael's table. Repeatedly she filled Boylston's wineglass, then her own, and called for more claret when the first bottle was empty. The wine dizzied her, but she recklessly drank it down as it seemed to give her the fortitude she felt she needed. She devoted herself to the doctor, her eyes on his, on her plate, on Stärk and his orchestra, roaming about the gay, gabbling, noisy room, anywhere except towards Michael's table. There she knew he sat, watching, watching, watching; she dared not let herself imagine what he was thinking. Boylston, flushed with claret, leaned across the table, leering, babbling amorously.

"You're beautiful to-night, little Zelda, you're wonderful to your old duffer. Why can't you be always this way? Why can't you be always so kind, little Zelda, little Zelda-poppy?"

There was a tall, round-topped mirror in the panelling at her left, the lower edge a foot or so above the level of their table; by straightening herself a few inches, she could see a reflection of that part of the room which included Michael's table. She hazarded a glance, a quick one, casually managed. She was right.

Half turned in his chair he sat, eyes riveted upon her. The wave of sickening, terrifying emotion swept over her again. She reached for her wineglass and gulped its contents. No second look, but while she beamed at Boylston, and pretended to be amused by his jokes, even achieving a witticism or two in return, out of the corner of her eye she observed that other table on the farther side of the room and its four occupants. Once the attentive ear of her mind fancied she distinguished Michael's voice.

He rose at last. She could see the shadowy figures of himself and his companions. The waiter was helping them on with their coats. Not for a minute dared she let her eyes wander. Vivaciously she chatted with the doctor. Long, long afterwards, she ventured a swift survey of the fast emptying restaurant. He was gone. There was an old man mumbling over his food in the seat Michael had occupied. Then she laughed a little wildly and close behind her mirth came a sob; Boylston thought she choked, and begged her insistently to drink some more wine.

§ 3

Two hours later, the black awful night, Boylston pawing, whispering thickly, plaguing, harassing, annoying her. No sleep; no rest; nothing but the beast beside her who would permit her no escape from his disgusting purposes.

In the morning, beaten, weary, exhausted, she wrote:

DEAR MICHAEL: I must see you, I've *got* to see you. I can't stand the miserableness of my life any longer. I saw you last night, of course, but I wouldn't let you think I saw you, but my heart was crying aloud to you all the time. Dearest, tell me where, when and how we can meet. I will not fail you this time. I need your help and I need your love.

Your ever faithful but wretched

ZELDA.

§ 4

He met her two days later in the reading room of the Mechanics' Library, and together they wandered out into the gusty, gritty street, but the chill, boisterous wind was a summer zephyr, the flying dust and chaff swept past unnoticed and the bustling, thronging thoroughfare seemed peopleless, a meadow lane; there were primroses by the street curb, the fragrance of wind-blown poppies in the air, and trembling music somewhere just above their heads.

"Ah, Michael darling, I'm so unhappy."

"Zelda, Zelda, what can I do? How can I help you?"

"Sweetheart, you're so *good* to see me, you're so *good* to come."

"But, dearest, you don't know how I've longed and longed for you. I'd come to you from the ends of the earth."

Words—phrases—endearments. What they said was of so little consequence. They were together again, that was important, together, and this time, they said to each other over and over, this time nothing should ever part them.

Up and down the streets they wandered oblivious of everything, engrossed only in each other. At Lotta's Fountain he bought her a ten-cent bunch of violets. Their steps led them toward Chinatown, and they found a little balcony overhanging a narrow, musty smelling street, where a sleepy coolie served them tea and rice cakes.

She told him her story then, told it with passionate tears, choking explanations, sobs, self-abasement. She could not look at him while she spoke, dreading lest the expression on his face might rob her of her courage to tell him everything. He said nothing when she had finished; there was a long silence. After a little, she dared lift her eyes. It was as she feared. He sat stricken, staring at his fingers, making meaningless marks upon

the table with the end of a broken match, his eyes dull, glazed, his lined young face swept clean of its habitual wrinkled merriment. She sobbed afresh, realizing overwhelmingly all she had thrown away, realizing how deeply she had hurt him, even more grievously than she had feared.

Oh, Michael must forgive her, must be friends with her once more! At any cost he must be hers again, her confidant, her ally. Her only peace of mind, her only happiness, depended on his friendship and his love. She was alone with him on the little balcony. Heavy Chinese curtains, rich in reds and gold embroidery, shut off the adjoining tea room; passers-by in the street below could see but little of what went on behind the lacquered grille work of the balcony.

She went around to his side of their table, sank to her knees at his side, putting her arms about him.

"Michael, Michael," she whispered miserably.

His face betrayed his distress with a sharp troubled frown. He pulled away, his lips quivering, but she stilled them with a quick pressure of her own.

"Don't turn against me, Michael dear. I can't live without you. You're the only one in all this world I love, you and you alone, and I just can't go on. What is there for me to live for, if you won't forgive me? . . . Michael, just love me, that's all. I don't want anything but just your love. I've lost your respect, I know, but can't you go on loving me even if you don't respect me? Michael, you *must* forgive me; I tell you I can't go on living unless you do. I'll win back your faith in me, if you'll just give me a chance. Oh, Michael, you must, *must* give me a chance!"

She drew down his head to hers and kissed him, kissed his eyes, his forehead, his cheeks, his mouth, her tears wetting his face. Suddenly he gripped her, straining her to him, his lips on hers. They clung desperately together, pulses throbbing, hearts hammering, waves of desire pouring through them.

§ 5

She was alone that night. The black pall of darkness surrounded her, the vacant chambers with their sibilant whispering and their flitting shadows pressed about her, above, below, on every side. The street lamp flung its usual lurid pattern on the ceiling. The covering of her bed gleamed in the dimness of the room like a white pall across her small, straight figure. One bright bead of light,—a reflection of some brilliancy from the street,—glowed small and fine on one of the round brass bed knobs.

She was not satisfied. That questioning, puzzled look on Michael's face as he parted from her, his gentleness after that one outbreak of passion? For the rest of the afternoon, his mirth, his easy grin, his jolly laugh, the quick wrinkling of his face to every smile,—all so characteristic of him,—had lacked something. Back of those squinting eyes lurked a hidden hurt. She felt it. There was no word of reproach, no criticism, but there was restraint in his manner. He had not taken her back to his heart; he did not feel the same toward her as he had!

Tears coursed her cheeks, she fisted her hands, breathing his name into the darkness.

"Michael! Michael!" . . . Oh, God, if she could only die!

The bed she lay in,—Boylston's bed,—burned her, scorched her flesh. She flung back the covers and escaped from it. By the window, curled in the plush armchair, she huddled in her thin night dress and stared out upon the street, listening to the occasional echoing footfalls that broke the stillness of the night.

§ 6

Two days of anxiety and waiting. Then a message:

This afternoon at the library at three—if you can make it.

MICHAEL.

§ 7

Love—passion again. Clandestine meetings, stolen hours, rapture, enthrallment.

But it was not the same. Michael was no longer the Michael of old, the little squinty-eyed boy with the sweet grin who lived with his mother, the music teacher, down the Sacramento Street hill. Just wherein lay the difference, Zelda could not say, or rather she was afraid to say. He was older perhaps. But that did not account for it. He knew more of life and the ways of the world, he was a man, no longer the affectionate simple boy she had known two years before. But neither did that explain the change. He made her cry now, cry from loving him so much. Unconsciously, he humiliated her, she, who had always thought herself so proud! Happy-go-lucky, merry careless Michael was never unkind. He was incapable of deliberate unkindness. He hurt her, none the less, hurt her more and more as time went on, stabbed her deeply.

Days drifted into weeks, weeks into months, before Zelda forced herself to admit the truth of the situation, stared the unwelcome fact in the face. Michael "looked down on her!" She was no longer Zelda Marsh, niece of the Burgesses, his schoolmate, his "girl," his sweetheart. Now she was "Doc Boylston's mistress,"—the woman Boylston "was keeping,"—one to "sneak off in the afternoons and have a good time with!"

Ah, the humiliation of it, the *shame!*

She knew little else but tears these nights and days. She lived only for the hours she spent with Michael, bringing him small gifts, things she had made for him with her own hands, carrying away with her the memory of what he said, how he looked, of this or that little act of consideration which showed he thought of her, her comfort, her happiness, her love.

The intervals between their meetings were hells of horror and degradation. Boylston with his smirk, the

tedious accounts of his affairs, his whining reproaches, his amorous leers, his pawing and disgusting fondling. She felt that she had to submit to him, had to give to him her lips that still quivered with the pressure of Michael's kiss, had to surrender herself to his loathsome embrace when every fibre of her being called only for her lover's arms!

Unsupportable! Whatever Michael's attitude toward her had once been, however ardently he may have wished for a life with her, a home, marriage, escape from his mother's domination, all this was over now. That she could see clearly. He loved her, but he didn't love her *hard* enough, not as once he had loved her, or as she fancied he had!

To extricate herself from her intolerable position she knew she need look for no help from him; she could not even count on him for sympathy. No word of Boylston to Michael, none of Michael to the doctor. Alone she plodded from one day to another, telling and living lies, deceiving, pretending, acting, her heart sick, her self-respect gone, befouled, mired, guttered,—for essentially Zelda was honest. Her love, her overwhelming, insatiable love, drove her on.

Almost from the very beginning of the resumption of her relations with Michael, Zelda had contemplated escape, and in her heart she knew that the way to achieve it lay only within herself. Work. Independence. Freedom. The course was straight before her. She was intelligent enough to see what was the only way out, but she was barely twenty-one. In many matters she was still a little girl, a little girl grown up. A job? Selling ribbons at O'Connor, Moffatt's? Operating a sewing machine for some seamstress? Waiting on table in a restaurant? These things she might do. . . . . Perhaps she could, perhaps she couldn't. . . . . She was afraid. Three years with Boylston had done something to her; the degrading intimacy with him, the sordid, unnatural atmosphere of her wretched make-believe

home in an office building, and the knowledge that was borne in upon her more and more that she was a "kept woman,"—these things had left their mark upon her. She had drifted into the rôle of mistress hardly knowing what she did, and when the ugly fact had forced recognition, her attitude had been one of good-natured indifference. Boylston was kind, and she pitied him; she had endured him rather than hurt him. But now the full force of her position came upon her with violent detestation. Hand in hand with it, came doubt, fear, self-distrust. For three years there had been a ready supply of golden twenties. She had but to ask for what she pleased, and while her requests had generally been modest, her petitions had been granted without a demurring word. Twenties here, twenties there, always twenties to be had at hint, at a pout.

"Oh-o-o," she sobbed, bowing her shut eyes upon her clasped hands. "What's to become of me? What's to become of me?"

She was alone in her little suite. It was late in the afternoon of a day when she had no appointment with Michael, a day which, like all the others when she did not see him, was devoid of interest. Boylston would be coming in upon her within an hour or two, and she would have to listen to the usual wearying history of what had happened at the clinic, what Doctor Humphries had said to him and what he had said to Doctor Humphries. Then dinner and the hot winey breath, and the soft plushy palms pawing, pawing!

A cry escaped her. She stifled it with a quick motion of the back of her hand against her mouth, but the wild stare remained in her eyes as they fixed themselves on the door that led to the adjoining office.

God! She couldn't go on with it!

She leaned her hot forehead against the cold glass of the windowpane, watching the hurrying figures, so many of them women, happy, busy, going to and from

their jobs in stores and offices, wage earners, self-respecting.

"I've *got* to do it," she kept repeating. "There's nobody to help me but myself. I *must* make the break."

§ 8

Nevertheless, she continued to temporize, hating herself, loathing Boylston, despising her deceptions. She used to wonder what he would do if he knew.

"Zelda-poppy, little Zelda-poppy, what makes you so cross these days? You used to be kind to your old duffer once in awhile, and now you're never anything but provoked with him! . . . Aw, come on, Zelda, give your old duffer a kiss. Aw, come on, be nice, Zelda, be nice to your old duffer."

If Michael could picture the hell in which she lived he must take her out of it. She said as much to herself twenty times each day. The moment would come when she would tell him, the moment would come when she would feel sure of his love, and then she would confess everything and implore him to take her away. She didn't want marriage. That was not important to her. She wanted Michael. If only they might run away together! A sailing ship bound for the South Seas. Michael would like that. . . . Money, money, always the problem of money. Somehow between them they would find the money. . . . Escape. . . . Ah, she was always escaping from something. Bakersfield,—her uncle's house,—now this!

She talked of taking ship, a trading schooner or a tramp steamer bound for some distant port beyond the Equator, and Michael listened with a far-away look of longing in his eyes, and when she spoke of the South Seas they actually glowed with excitement. At the library one day, she amused herself, while waiting for him, by calling for a book on the southern archipelagoes,

and reading of the Marquesas, Tahiti and Papeete, and later stirred his enthusiasm to fever point, describing the possibilities of a life together there: a thatched hut, the tropical sun, fishing, swimming, his chance to paint, the problem of existence reduced to a minimum. They were forever discussing it, telling each other what they were going to do when settled on their island. It was "their ship," "their thatched hut," "their island" always.

Just talk, no more.

"Oh, Michael, couldn't we really do it? Couldn't we really find out something definite about ships sailing down that way? I know I could put my hand on two or three hundred dollars by selling some of the things that Doctor Boylston has given me and that actually belong to me——"

She caught her lip; Boylston's name was unfortunate; a quick frown on Michael's face. She went on rapidly, ending again with,

"Couldn't we really do it, Michael? Couldn't we ask about ships and find out what it would cost?"

"Sur-re, sur-re," he agreed. "I'll—I'll see somebody about it."

There it ended; even with his emphatic promise that he would make inquiries, she knew in her heart he would do nothing. Behind him, coloring all his life, was the dominating figure of his mother. . . . His mother and Boylston! . . . She could and would, when she was ready, free herself from the one, but Michael was powerless beneath the sway of the other.

§ 9

Summer came laggingly. The wetness of May merged into the wetness of June. Rain—rain—rain. The weather did not matter so much to Zelda. Nothing mattered but Michael, and as long as she could see him and be with him two or three times a week, the heavens

might empty themselves for a year for aught she cared. Boylston was extremely busy; so many people had colds and he was suffering from a touch of grippe himself. He reeked of disinfectants these days and sought his quarters in the California Hotel at night.

A Tuesday in late June. Tuesdays Michael and Zelda always met, spent the afternoon together and talked over plans for the rest of the week. In the reading room of the library Zelda sat watching the minute hand of the octagonal oak clock jerk its languid way toward three o'clock. She usually had to wait for Michael; she did not mind waiting for him. It thrilled her to see him come in, snatching off his hat as he passed through the swing doors, his sandy face lighting up with its wrinkled smile at the first glimpse of her, and to watch his lurching gait, as he came hurrying toward her, embarrassed, grinning, charming, taking her hand. Dear Michael! Often the loving thought of him hurt with throbbing pain.

It was drizzling outside. Tops of umbrellas, shining with water, passed and repassed in the street behind the librarian's desk at the window. The big room smelled of paper, leather, rubbers and wet woolens. The dampness without seemed to penetrate to farthest corners within. Zelda shivered; she felt chilly and her feet were cold. . . . Her eyes roved. She studied the young girl at the librarian's desk and tried to imagine what it might be like to be self-supporting, a wage earner with regular employment and regular hours. . . . Another girl, a high school student, at a table close by was copying a long passage from a thick, heavily-bound volume. Only a few years ago she, too, had been a high school girl! How much longer it seemed! Over three years. More like thirteen. . . .

The hands of the clock stood at five past three. Michael was late, but he was almost always late. She wondered for the thousandth time what was going to happen to him and to her. If his mother would only die!

How often she had prayed for that! Small chance of its happening. Only a day or two ago she read of Mrs. Kirk giving an organ recital in a church. If she, Zelda, were only sure of Michael,—if she only dared demand that he choose between them! But she knew him now. He hated to make decisions, he shrank from facing an issue. Any compromise was better than a definite "Yes" or "No." . . . Poor Michael! How certain it was that life would deal harshly with him! If only she could devote herself to protecting him, taking care of him. He needed her. How desperately he needed her! Sooner or later his mother *must* die. What would become of him, then? What a fool Mrs. Kirk, to stand in the way of his marrying the one girl of all others he knew or was likely to know, who would make her son the ideal wife she hoped and prayed for? In her innermost soul Zelda saw she was meant for Michael; she had much more to give to him than he had to give her; she had courage, determination, character, as well as a capacity for work, for slaving, for infinite patience and self-sacrifice. Michael was lacking in all these qualities. He was loving and sweet and he was an artist, not only in hand and eye, but in *soul*. He was not fitted for the struggle of life; his mother had spoiled him, shielded him, had helped to make him what he was. But for his very shortcomings Zelda loved him. She saw he was weak, but she was strong, and she asked nothing better than to be allowed to bring her strength to his aid, taking up, perhaps, the spoiling and shielding at the point where his mother left off. Michael was like that: people would always spoil him and make allowances for him. People would, but life? Life was cruel, unyielding, exacting.

It was half past three now. Half an hour late. Tardiness was characteristic of Michael. Shortly he would come in, breathless, with a glib tale on his tongue to explain the delay. He was always plausible, and who could find fault with him?

At quarter to four the first fear entered Zelda's heart. He was not coming. When the minute hand reached the full hour she was resigned to it, but sat on nevertheless, hoping against hope, and only at five minutes to five stiffly rose to her feet and slowly, wearily walked home in the drizzling rain.

There was no word from him the next day, but she wandered down to the library at their usual meeting hour and sat in her accustomed place, idly reading a magazine, in the hope that he might chance to come in. The next day she did the same thing,—and the next—and the next. There was no sign of him nor any message.

Grayness filtered in and veiled all life. The shadow of an impending blow lay upon her heart. She noticed an involuntary trembling of her lips and hands, and her eyes took on a dull fixity that more than once drew from Boylston a solicitous inquiry. She did not hear him, she did not see him, he did not exist for her. Only when he dared to lay a hand on her did she turn on him with the fury of a wildcat, fingers crooked, eyes flashing, teeth clenched.

Days passed, and with them the rain gave place to golden sunshine that flooded the city with heartening graciousness. Across the bay the hills loomed green, and in the streets flower venders' stands turned bright with color. Ladies with rustling skirts and gay hats went cheerfully about neglected shopping, the dummies of the cable cars were crowded once more, nurses with their charges filled the parks, and children romped or roller-skated up and down the dry, clean pavements.

On Sunday afternoon a quiet, comfortable, sunny stillness lay upon the deserted streets. The city dwellers, for the most part, had sought the country. A carriage or two wheeled leisurely along Van Ness Avenue, the horses' hoofs making a hollow clopping on the asphalt. Dressed in her decorous best, Zelda walked slowly along the thoroughfare until she came to the corner of

Sacramento Street. The neighborhood always brought a tightening of her heart. Whenever she had an occasion to ride up town and a choice of routes was presented, she would board a Sacramento Street car. It gave her a view of the Burgess house as it trundled up the hill, and once she had seen her aunt clipping roses in the garden. Now she turned eastward, crossed to the opposite side of the street and with racing pulse, approached the little cottage where she had so often twisted the door bell before her music lesson. But she was not thinking of her music lessons now. While half a block or more away, she made out the flamboyant, gawdy Ranier Beer sign that marked the "family entrance" of the grocery, and on the further corner the bright blue and red jars in the windows of Val Schmidt's drug store. Even before the Kirk cottage came into view she scented the stale smell of steam and drying clothes, that always clung to the Chinese washhouse that stood opposite it. Then came the picket fence, and the little garden of violets, calla lilies, geraniums, and lastly the house itself, with drawn curtains and closed door. White bills were pasted on the inner side of the windows: "To Let—Furnished."

She stood for a long time, staring. Presently she recrossed the street and pushed open the rickety swing gate. Among the dark green, clustering leaves she found a few belated violets, and then, with a last, searching look she clicked the little gate shut and went slowly upon her way.

A week, an interminable week, dragged by. It was the doctor who told her the news, cast it off flippantly as he might have tossed away the ash from his cigar tip. He was reading the pages of a San Francisco weekly, as she went to and fro setting the table for the meal they would presently share.

"I see that old music teacher of yours, that Mrs. Kirk, and her son, have gone to Europe. He's going to study art over there for three years. . . . Say,

Zelda, why don't you take up your music again? I could rent you a little piano and you might have a lot of fun up here playing something nice and pretty in the evenings for your old duffer. You used to love it. How about it? Would you like it?"

Michael had known all along he was going, and he had been afraid to tell her! He had been afraid to tell her, and he had known all along!

He would write now and explain. He would beg her to forgive him, and with underscored words tell her of his devotion and everlasting love!

But in this she was mistaken. There was never any letter.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

§ 1

ZELDA lifted the one silk waist she possessed from the sudsy water of the basin and examined the inside of the collar where it was apt to soil. She immersed it again and gently rubbed the soft fabric to and fro. At her back the flame of the alcohol stove over which the iron was heating sent a hot wave against her neck. Beads of perspiration covered her forehead, and now and then little trickles ran down between her breasts. A suffocating day, one of New York's worst.

Nevertheless, there was something exciting about the heat, Zelda found; the hotter it grew the more exciting it became. Moreover, it provoked a pleasant neighborliness in the street. Windows stood wide, revealing interiors of bedrooms in which figures in weird scanty attire appeared and disappeared; some of these lolled across stone sills to complain of the heat to acquaintances in other windows, occasionally shrilling an irritable admonition to an indifferent offspring on the pavements below. Toward evening, groups began to gather on stoops, the women in thin white dresses, the men coatless and vestless, talk arose, a pleasant lightness in voices, laughter, good-humored protests, the bass rumble of masculine chaffing, girlish peals, the distant jingle of a hurdy-gurdy, a piano somewhere, singing, children darting from curb to curb, their piping cries like needle stabs in the dusk. Zelda loved the friendliness of it all, loved the vigorous pulse of life that beat about her, loved New York, loved living.

She had been in the city nearly two months now. It was the last of July. From the first she had felt New York belonged to her and she to it. San Francisco? A strange place where she had lived many years before, a place of heartache, imprisonment, degradation. Black memories. Was it only a year ago since she had escaped from it? Only a year? Two, from the days of the dark, hideous, echoing Fuller Building, one—less than one in fact—since she had left the city. Yet the life she had known in those dusty, gusty streets seemed much longer ago than that,—ten years, a score of years.

Carefully now she wrung the sheer silk fabric, squeezing it in her hands without twisting it, and laid it near the window on a clean piece of wrapping paper. Then she peeled her handkerchiefs from the window glass and unpinned her stockings from the lace curtains where whatever current of air that had stirred since morning, had dried them. Next she set about her ironing on the marble top of the wash stand which she first covered with a folded blanket and a sheet from the bed. It was hot work. Drops of sweat fell from her forehead and hissed upon the iron in her hand. Alcohol, kerosene stoves, any contrivance for heating, were not allowed in the rooms. Madame Boulanger explained that the fire laws forbade it, but the good lady knew perfectly well that most of her roomers did as they pleased about the matter. Some of them cooked three meals a day behind their closed doors. The odors that drifted through the house, particularly at midday! Telltale smells that left no one in any doubt as to what occasioned them. Still a pretense of observing Madame's rules was in order, and so Zelda's portal was fast shut and not a breath of air came in from the murky street.

In spite of the warmness of the room and her general sense of stickiness and suffocation, Zelda hummed as she ran her iron dexterously over the sheer linen, folding it neatly back upon itself, pressing in the creases. She ought to feel worried and discouraged, she told

herself, but she wasn't. She had been in New York two months without an engagement nor was there any prospect of one in sight. Yet she felt light-hearted. That was the way New York affected her. It had been so from the very first day, the very first moment in fact when, with George and Nina on either side of her, she had walked out on the deck of the ferryboat and beheld the huge gray mass of buildings on the opposite shore that stretched up and down the river in either direction as far as the eye could reach. . . .

§ 2

After Michael ran away from her, it was black despair for a while. There would always be a stab of pain, cruel pain, straight to the centre of her heart whenever she thought of Michael—her beloved boy! For a time, weeks, months, she couldn't remember exactly how long, it seemed impossible to go on living. She had not wanted to live, there was nothing to live for. She tried to dull her mind in various ways, by excesses even. They only bored her, made her ill. She wanted Michael and only Michael; nothing else counted. She did not care a rap about Boylston, where he went nor what he did, save only that he should not touch her. She would turn on him then with a snarl and clenched hands. She could not bear him to come near her; physically he had become repulsive.

They quarrelled; there was a long period of sulking on his part; Zelda sought distraction in trashy, paper-covered novels, and stuffed herself with caramels and chocolate creams. Presently Boylston closed his purse and absented himself. Necessity drove Zelda to make some sort of an effort; she would have cut herself to pieces rather than capitulate to him.

A suggestion here, an encouraging word there, her own fervent admiration for the stage, led her finally to muster sufficient courage to beard Max Meyerowitz of

the Alcazar Stock Company in his dingy office and ask for the smallest kind of a job. He was neither abrupt nor savage, though she had half expected him to be both. She needed coaching, he told her, voice culture, training, dramatic instruction; she must have a six months' course, and he sent her to Miss Boltè. Two hundred dollars, Zelda found to her dismay, was the tuition fee, but she was not to be daunted. She took to the pawn shop everything of value that Boylston had ever given her, rings, brooches, her watch with the gold bow of ribbon, even dresses, her gay, flowered hats, shoes. She raised the two hundred and a little more, a very little more but enough to keep her going for a while. Then Fortune stretched out a helping hand: a Christmas pantomime at the Tivoli, Ferris Hartman wanted all the extras he could get. There were twelve dollars a week until almost the middle of February. Next came the day of days when Meyerowitz telephoned he needed an extra girl, and Miss Boltè sent Zelda down to him. She got the part, a maid's part with two lines, but Meyerowitz used her in his next two productions.

Long before that Boylston had tried to make peace. He offered money, agreed to observe any relationship she stipulated, urged marriage, and presently grew importunate that she should marry him, promising her, as he expressed it, "to set her up in style." Arguments, scenes, reproaches, supplications, were followed by complete capitulation on his part; he wept ridiculously, got down on the floor, clawed at her knees, called himself "an old duffer," and implored her not to leave him. He merely disgusted her. She felt sorry for him, sincerely sorry, she had no resentment, no wish to hurt or humiliate him, but it was impossible for her to go on. He offended her, and she had found a new interest in living.

When summer came, she could endure him no longer. He wanted her to go away with him for a vacation.

She declined. He urged marriage. She refused. The dreary, dusty, dirty, echoing Fuller Building stifled her; it seemed to remind her constantly of all she had lost: Michael and her youth. A day came when she resolved she would never enter it again. She had saved a little. Even though Meyerowitz did not use her every week, —sometimes a month would go by without his casting her,—still she had faith she could take care of herself. The wardrobe woman, Mrs. Cassidy, a weird, old, wrinkled creature in charge of the costumes at the Alcazar, agreed to rent her a small back room in her dark, shabby house on Ellis Street. The break followed, a terrible scene, revolting, shocking. Zelda, in that dreadful hour, lost all feeling of pity, sympathy; to be quit of this man, to have him go, leave her, never to see him again, was the one and only thing she desired.

Three months later came the Meserves, Henry and Olivia Meserve, "Ned," as she was always called, and the engagement at the California Theatre. A fairy tale, a wild dream turned by magic into actuality!

Henry Meserve had been a popular matinée idol on Broadway, New York, in his youth. Zelda had seen pictures of him in which he was remarkably handsome. Next he had married Olivia, and the years brought patches of gray to either temple, and a heavy substantiality which no longer permitted him to play romantic rôles. He had turned his mind to the organization of a company of his own which he took from one city to another, presenting a repertoire of plays recently successful in the East. An indifferent actor himself, he was on the other hand an excellent director, and a capable business man.

His company's engagement in San Francisco was for six weeks and owing to the fact that he was an independent producer and outside the Trust, the only theatre he could secure was the somewhat second-rate California. It was during the third week of his stay that he decided to put in rehearsal a play by a local drama-

tist, a Biblical drama entitled "Joshua." He needed a number of extras for it, and called upon Meyerowitz of the Alcazar for as many of his young actors and actresses as he could spare. Zelda with a dozen others went to him. The excitement of it, the hopes, the anxiety! A dozen lines were given each to read from the brilliant stage into the cavern of a black auditorium where in some far corner Mr. Meserve sat in silent, cold-blooded judgment. But Zelda was called back, and asked to read again. A brief conversation with the great man, himself, followed. He had squinted his eyes at her approvingly, asked a few questions, and told her to report for rehearsal the next morning at ten o'clock.

An engagement for a week, possibly two, was all that it promised at first, but Meserve decided to put "Joshua" on in Los Angeles as well, and he invited Zelda to join him there when the time came to produce it.

During the period of rehearsal and the fortnight's run of the play, Zelda grew to know all the members of the company and to conceive for each of them a burning admiration. Olivia Meserve, "Ned," the high-strung, temperamental leading woman, filled the girl's heart with suffocating pride by showing a distinct favoritism for the "little Frisco pick-up," as the actress chose to call her. Meserve, himself, hardly noticed her, but any word from him meant criticism, and Zelda interpreted his silence as approval.

Nina Chamberlaine was the black-haired soubrette, and from the first Zelda warmed to her. She was friendly, simple, garrulous, full of advice and suggestions which were of incalculable help to the inexperienced newcomer. Then there was Suzanne,—Suzanne Blake. Zelda remembered her first impression of her,—exquisite, beautiful, a princess type, with fine, coldly chiselled features and fly-away golden hair, bleached perhaps, but glorious nevertheless. Suzanne! Her jealousy had been so unjustifiable, so unprovoked!

Looking back on those early weeks Zelda could say honestly she had done nothing to warrant Suzanne's animosity. She had actually disliked George Selby in the beginning, disliked and avoided him.

A real welcome awaited her when she joined the company in Los Angeles early in November. Nina came down to the train to meet her, and there were plenty of warm handshakes, including a kiss from old Mrs. Kittridge when she appeared at the theatre the following morning. Ned was particularly effusive. Extraordinary Ned! She conceived a violent enthusiasm for her "Frisco pick-up." Nina warned the girl it would pass. Ned would suddenly cool off, grow indifferent, become critical, even hostile.

Meanwhile, the actress's impulsive liking resulted in Zelda's becoming a regular member of the company, and the girl, remembering this time, believed everyone had been glad. Perhaps Suzanne had not, for she had begun to resent George's attention to Zelda, but that situation did not definitely present itself until several weeks later.

The new acquisition found herself Ned Meserve's marked protegée. A beautiful woman of extraordinary coloring was Ned, her hair and complexion of a vivid reddish tinge. The former was magnificent; there were masses of it, thick and curly; no matter how carefully old Mammy Bull arranged it, it looked untidy, but the confusion was becoming. Ned affected a great many trailing draperies; even in her stage costumes there were always trains and flowing sleeves. Her arms were long, beautiful and white, and she was given to much gesturing with bracelets jangling from her wrists. Zelda admired her inordinately. No one could resist Ned's warmth and effusiveness. She took Zelda to luncheon, invited her to her dressing-room, and insisted upon her company for beer and something to eat after performances. A developing experience for Zelda. She had suddenly been picked out of a humdrum, distasteful life

and plunged into the midst of a seething, fascinating one. She had imagined herself disillusioned, sophisticated, worldly-wise. The confidences of Nina and Suzanne, both of whom were unmarried, and claimed to be as yet free from any entangling love affair, shocked, even appalled her. A few months before she had been on the point of suicide, a quick jump on a dark foggy night from the end of a ferryboat, but now every moment pulsed with such thrilling novelty and sensation, she feared she could not assimilate it all. She thirsted for every contact, for every new experience, for preferment, popularity, success.

Yet throughout all these new experiences, this new world, Michael still lived in her heart. The pain had dulled perhaps, or maybe she had grown used to it, but time made no difference in her feelings.

§ 3

George Selby was the company's juvenile. He was the romantic type, with black hair which he wore in a graceful sweep off his forehead, and he was undeniably handsome—straight brows, deep-set, shadowy eyes, a clean, straight nose, a soft, rather sensuous mouth and a firm, rounded chin. But George was far too heavy to play juveniles and besides he was not a very good actor. Henry Meserve was continually criticizing him, hammering at him in rehearsal, making him go through his scenes again and again.

From the first, Zelda had taken a definite dislike to him. She considered him both conceited and vain. During the first rehearsals of "Joshua," when she had stood in the wings of the California watching the play, she felt sure he observed her, and suspected he was attempting to impress her with his attitudes and his strutting. She had not been in the least interested, and had turned away indifferently. For a time she succeeded in keeping clear of him, but she had underestimated his amazing

self-confidence. One day when she had been studying her lines in an obscure corner back stage, he came up to her and his first words were:

"Why don't you want to know me?"

After that he sought her company whenever time or opportunity permitted. Nobody was aware of this except Zelda, herself. She was annoyed rather than pleased, and presently confided the situation to Nina; they laughed about it and made fun of him when they were alone. Up to that time George had been Suzanne's admirer. Nina had told Zelda of his attachment to her, and it was far from the newcomer's intention to try to take him away. Zelda had only contempt for him; her thoughts belonged to Michael; she had no wish for another man in her life.

But George Selby was different from the men she had known before. With all his personal conceit, he was a delightfully amusing fun-maker. An exuberance of spirits bubbled up in him continually. He could sing —a pleasing, well-modulated baritone—he could play the piano, he had a ready stock of songs and stories; he was not a natural comedian but he was constantly striving to make people laugh, and more often than not he succeeded. He was full of temperament, now soaring in the clouds, high-spirited, laughing, bursting with excitement and extravagant statements, now in the depths, talking of failure and suicide. His enthusiasm was like a whirlwind and gradually day by day, then swiftly in a rush, it focussed itself upon Zelda.

In the same breath with which he declared his love for her, he begged her to marry him. It had flattered her, particularly as he promptly aired his feelings to every member of the company. Suzanne, the little Dresden china beauty, felt very badly about it, but Zelda could not hold herself responsible. There were whisperings, buzz, everybody discussed it; it made Zelda uncomfortable. She refused George's offer, sending him definitely to the right-about, and in New

Orleans he went on a mad carouse and boasted openly of an affair with a common little chorus girl of a musical comedy company playing at another theatre. Sordid, disgusting. Zelda despised him for it. She would have nothing to do with him, declined even to speak to him.

Next, George had tried to console himself with drink; he drank himself into inebriation every night after the performance and appeared the next day bloated, glass-eyed, thick of speech, declaring to whomever would hear him that he hoped Henry Meserve would fire him and that he then could go to hell as he pleased. Zelda thought it all very absurd. She wished heartily that Henry would take the ridiculous fellow at his word but the trouble had been, as Ned pointed out, replacing him. Good juveniles were scarce; so late in the season it would be a difficult matter to find one who could play his various rôles even in a remotely satisfactory way. Ned, and even Nina begged Zelda to agree to some sort of friendly relation with George, but she refused. The man repelled her. Henry Meserve grew sour, and barked at her. With Selby he could do nothing. Matters reached a climax toward the end of the Saint Louis engagement. George actually tried to kill himself. The odor of gas in the cheap lodging house wherein he had taken a room was detected in time, and he was sent promptly to a hospital.

An upset, disorganized time. Henry wired New York for any juvenile available to replace George. A young, scraggly boy from a local company was given a tryout. Report came that Selby was dying. Zelda, accompanied by Nina, went to see him. She had to listen to a long, broken, tearful story of repentance, to extravagant assurances of sobriety and straight living if she would accept him as a friend. It was affecting even though she could see he was not so ill as she had been told, nor as he himself would have her think. Reconciliation was the only course open to her, although she never remotely believed that a resumption of any sort of

friendly relations with him would bring about good results.

Absurd, ridiculous George! A little boy, a child. It was impossible to take him seriously, equally impossible to be angry with him as he deserved. He would offend her one moment and weary her the next with extravagant repentance. One could not help liking him, he was so pathetically eager to please.

In two days' time he rose from his hospital cot, a chastened, regenerated young man, pledged to redeem himself in the eyes of his associates and prove himself worthy of a wonderful girl's generosity. Characteristically, he dramatized his redemption and became at once all that was virtuous and admirable. Zelda laughed at him; the rest smiled. It had as little effect on George Selby as the black looks he had won when his ways were dissolute and profligate. His rôle overnight became an irreproachable one, and he played it to the uttermost degree. No liquor passed his lips; he gave up cigarettes, he threw himself with passionate earnestness into his work, listened as never before to Meserve's directions, was prompt at rehearsal and performance, took himself directly from the theatre to his hotel at night, and devoted himself to Zelda, grateful for an approving glance, a spontaneous laugh at some of his nonsense, her slightest evidence of favor.

And that was George Selby.

The Meserves and their company had travelled through many cities and over many miles since then. February and March found them playing one or two week engagements throughout the Middle West, then slowly they moved eastward, through dark and sooty Pittsburg, Harrisburg, where for a week they faced empty houses, then Washington and spring, with cherry trees budding into leaf, gardens and parks brilliant with new blossoms, the first warm days. Holy Week was spent in idleness, then Baltimore, finally a glorious fortnight in Philadelphia, and through all these changing

scenes, George had remained Zelda's humble, devoted, ardent follower. His total abstemiousness lasted many weeks, and although after a while, he resumed drinking and smoking, only on one or two occasions did he over indulge, and then was desperately eager to make amends, and a creditable period of self-denial and sobriety would ensue.

Inevitably they grew intimate. He trailed her wherever she went, he played cards with her on trains, he escorted her to hotels from stations. She would find him waiting for her after an hour or two of idle gossip with Ned. In the cities they visited, there was a good deal of entertaining from which the company could not escape. Olivia and Henry had many friends and there were literary and dramatic clubs eager to give them receptions, and always rich bachelors who wished to arrange elaborate suppers after a performance. To some of these Zelda went. She was eager for experience, for glimpses into clubs, hotels, and private residences. George was always ready to accompany her. He was infinitely more experienced than herself in the ways of the world. He coached and protected her.

Grease paint, talk of plays and the stage, gossip, rumors of changes, plans, long hours of waiting for cues in close, perfume-scented dressing rooms, breakfasting at noon, quarrels with Ned, confidences with Nina, hotels, trains, theatres, Sunday dinners, midnight suppers, dancing, new faces, new friends, hopes realized, hopes crushed, kind and unkind newspaper notices, a strange, unfamiliar world where trivialities seemed to count for so much and essentials for so little, George—George Selby there, always there, humble, pathetic, hanging to her words, her moods, alternately amusing and distressing her.

Such had been her life since she had left San Francisco eight months ago, and the Zelda Marsh lying stretched on her bed in a theatrical rooming house, sweltering in the heat of a New York summer day knew

herself to be a far, far different person from the girl who had stared blankly at the deserted Kirk cottage on Sacramento Street with "To Let" bills pasted on the windows and had realized that the boy she loved had deserted her. Changed she might be in mind and matter, no change had come to her heart. Of that she was as certain as she was of her own identity. Michael lived there. She thought of him day by day, his old letters were frayed in their creases, and the little red morocco frame that held a snapshot of him with open shirt and tennis racket in his hands, grinning, wrinkling up his eyes, had begun to fade a little, but these were always with her.

CHAPTER II

§ 1

Madame Boulanger's establishment was situated in the West Forties, a brownstone crumbling old house like others near it. The Frenchwoman, herself, was large busted and wide of hip, her coarse, curly hair, fuzzy and gray, suggested a handful of stuffing from the inside of an old upholstered chair. She was moustachioed, bearded, and radiated a good, strong smell of garlic, but as John Chapman, who had the next room to Zelda's, declared, their landlady had a heart of gold. Everybody loved Madame Boulanger. Her roomers went, but they always returned.

There were a dozen lodging houses similar to Madame Boulanger's in the immediate neighborhood. The street was given over to stage folk, actors, actresses, vaudeville artists, chorus girls, even followers of the sawdust ring. There were wives and children, too, wives who also belonged to "the profession," and ringletted boys and girls in velvet suits and skirts. Among them were seamy faces with gray hair and shaggy eyebrows, dissolute faces with red noses and veined cheeks, fat, hard faces under crimped blond curls, hollow-eyed faces with burning looks, vacant, silly, simpering faces, and occasionally young, eager and innocent ones. They came and went, the old timers, a little threadbare and shiny of coat, nodding ceremoniously to one another, the newcomers laughing, quarrelling, gossiping, making love.

Restaurants, Italian, and French, advertising course dinners with wine at forty-five cents, dressmakers, costumers, wigmakers, tailors, laundries, tiny delicatessen

shops, occupied parlor floors and proclaimed themselves with garish signs, or else tucked themselves out of sight beneath stairways where they pursued precarious existences in gas-lit basements.

A shoddy neighborhood full of sights and smells and sounds, yet Zelda loved it, loved the people who belonged to it, loved the tales she heard above them, the gossip that sped from lip to lip, the little dramas she was able to watch and follow, loved the atmosphere, the romance, even the cheap and tawdry glamor that clung to the houses and the people who inhabited them.

It was so, too, of Madame Boulanger's. The old dwelling, with its dark halls, dark stairways, and weird and variegated smells, possessed a strange and delightful fascination for her. Her fellow lodgers interested and attracted her. She liked to hear about them from Madame. From the very first,—the hot night in June when Nina had brought her there, and the two girls had engaged the room they occupied together,—she had loved the place. Nina always went to Madame Boulanger's when she came to New York. But Nina within the month had flown off to Europe with a rich aunt and Zelda had moved upstairs to a little hall bedroom, second floor front.

Madame liked Zelda's attentive ears. In the late afternoons she and the girl used to drink hot chocolate together and eat thick slices of buttery bread in the basement dining-room which Madame kept for her own use and where there were two gilt canary cages whose full-throated, feathery occupants Zelda liked to feed. When the hot weather came, a syrupy, iced drink strengthened with a little gin was substituted for the chocolate and Zelda spent many a fascinated afternoon in her landlady's company listening to one rambling story after another.

John Chapman, whose room was next to Zelda's, held a particular interest for the girl. Madame did not know very much about him. A pleasant enough young

man, not young exactly, thirty and over she judged him; he had been two years with her in the same room winter and summer; six dollars a week he paid her. An actor he claimed to be, when he had engaged the room; but when and where, who could say? Certain it was he had had no work since he had lived at Number One Thirty-Eight: to that she would swear. But why should she or anyone concern himself? The young man was quiet, he minded his own business, he paid his room rent punctually every Sunday morning. Was there something mysterious about him? Well, that was what was said. Madame shrugged elaborately.

Zelda liked John Chapman, liked him very much, but unfortunately he was dull company. He had a heavy face and a cavernous mouth filled with big white teeth. Before the third week of her stay at Madame Boulanger's had passed, he had fallen hopelessly in love with her. She suspected it after a certain hot night when the two had sat out on the steps together. It was the night after Nina had sailed away. Zelda had gone to the steamer to say good-bye and had come back with her heart heavy with longing for Europe, travel and luxury, and with a feeling of being forsaken and friendless. George had some particular engagement for that night, and Madame Boulanger had gone to the seashore for the week-end. Zelda felt desperately lonely, haunted by thoughts of Michael, even by memories of Boylston. There had only been John to talk to; "Mr. Chapman," she called him then. The usual group had gathered on the steps at nine o'clock, but one by one these drifted away, and Zelda and John sat on and on until midnight had come and gone. There was a round, white moon, and the night was free from murkiness, the air warm and soft. Quite simply, hardly realizing what she was saying, Zelda told her story to the big silent man beside her: Bakersfield, San Francisco, Michael, Doctor Boylston, the Meserves. It was the first time she had spoken of Michael. No one among

her recent companions had ever heard her mention his name nor even Boylston's. Now of a summer night on the hard stone front steps of a theatrical rooming house in New York, she found herself speaking unreservedly of herself, telling her history in all its drab and bitter phases to a big clumsy man, a stranger whom she had known less than three weeks. Neither then nor later did she regret it; she was certain she never would. That was John Chapman. He was incapable of betraying a confidence. She did not worry about his trustworthiness; what she promptly commenced to worry about was the effect of her story upon him. She had at no time regarded it as either particularly tragic or pitiable, but overnight he had come to love her.

Late the next morning, just after she left the house to make her usual round of the agencies, she encountered him in the street. Somehow, she had known at once he had been waiting for her. Immediately, he had betrayed his adoration in every turn of his large, clumsy head, in every slow movement of his huge, thick fingered hands, in the cumbersome tread of his colossal, ungainly feet, in looks of idolatry from his big round soft brown eyes. He was three times her size, a man six feet tall, weighing well over two hundred pounds, much too large for the stage, yet he talked of nothing else. George Selby, for all his bigness, was lithesomeness and grace by comparison. John knew about George too, and, from his window, used to watch the young man and Zelda disappear down the street when they went away to spend the day together, or when he called to take her to lunch, or in the evening to dinner and the theatre. No hint of love, no faint suggestion of sentimentality ever passed John's lips, nor did he volunteer his society unless she requested it. She felt sorry for him. Appreciating his devotion, she valued it; he was to her like some older brother to whom she knew she could turn in any sort of worry or trouble. Yet he bored her, bored her insufferably. The slowness

of his wits, his inarticulateness, the clumsines of his mind as well as body made him a ponderous companion.

§ 2

During that first summer in New York, she saw a great deal of George. She was with him once or twice a week, and always on Saturday and Sunday they planned some excursion together. The intervening days were hot, tiresome, humiliating. There was the inevitable round of calls at Josephson's, Mrs. Bryan's, Hamilton Blake's, Garfinkle & Son's, the dreary waiting-rooms, the pert challenge at the counter, the indifferent or curt dismissal. Zelda hated it, had to clench her small teeth and force herself to mount the stairs or ascend in the elevator, as the case might be, make her appearance, look the usual hopeful interrogation, and take herself away with an assumption of cheerful indifference.

"But suppose I don't get anything?" she said to George one day with despair in her voice. They were thundering along of an early Saturday morning in an elevated train on their way to Coney Island.

"Well, you can always marry me," he told her joyously.

"Don't be foolish," she reproved him.

"It's only mid-August," he went on with seriousness. "Good G-god, Zel', you can't expect to break into the theatrical game without some kind of a struggle."

She was silent. The car lurched as the train rounded a curve, the iron wheels screaming their complaint. The aisle was full of strap-hangers. Already there had begun a munching of peanuts and candy. From the window there was a glimpse of the Ferris wheel and the tower in new Luna Park. Zelda sighed. For the first time since coming to New York there was real anxiety in her heart.

"Ah, kid, you mustn't get down in the mouth," George encouraged her. "It's too early for anything to

break yet. Harry Bulger's got a big show coming,—K. & E. production,—and they haven't begun casting yet."

"That's a musical show."

"Know it. . . . You can always get a job in the merry-merry."

"Once you get there you're lost forever. I know what I'm talking about. Ned told me and Nina told me. I'll go back to Frisco first."

"You got to be patient, Zel'. You'll get something good if you'll just stick 'round. Spoke to Stackpole about you the other day——"

"Yes?"— eagerly. "What'd he say?"

"He mentioned the merry-merry. Said he could use you all right if you'd sing and dance."

"I can't do either," Zelda said crossly, "and I wish you wouldn't talk about them to me."

"Told me he had a swell part for me. I said a hundred a week. Said he guessed he'd have to pay it."

The girl frowned and looked out of the window.

"I told him I couldn't afford to take less," George went on. "There's a chance for me with Weber and Fields; Stringer told me about it; wanted me to go and see Hawkins. 'If they want me,' I says to him, 'they can send for me.' I'm not going round begging anybody to give me a job."

Zelda turned sharply upon him with an impatient glance.

"You give me a pain," she remarked good-naturedly.

At once his brow clouded, he drew breath, preparing to defend himself.

"Oh, shut up; here we are," she said, getting to her feet. "How I *love* Coney!"

§ 3

It was one of many trips she and George had made together to the Island. They never varied their program now. Luna, Dreamland, Steeplechase, all the amusement parks held but little interest for them. Some-

times, late in the afternoon, they wandered in their direction in search of a dancing floor. Zelda was enthusiastic over the new sedate caper known as the "Coney Island Walk"; George did it beautifully; she loved dancing with him. But it was the ocean, the plunge in the breakers, the wild scream and leap in the face of a foaming wall of water, idling on the beach afterward, dozing, tanning, murmuring together, watching the shifting crowd of other bathers,—weird costumes, weird faces, pretty and handsome ones sometimes, a well-known one occasionally,—smoking when fingers were dry, munching hot dogs and drinking bottled beer from the man who peddled them, a casual acquaintance struck up with a neighboring couple, another plunge, a final hour in the last warmth of the receding afternoon, Zelda drying her hair, George drowsing beside her, his cheek pillowed on the cushion of a bent elbow,—this was what they liked best to do, this meant Coney Island to them, luxurious and happy days of young hearts, young minds, in pleasant, frank and easy companionship.

"Ah, Zelda, you're wonderfully pretty!"

"Oh, George, for heaven's sake."

"I'm mad about you. You look out o' sight in that rig. I like those short skirts. Don't care what people say. You got a swell shape, too."

"Please! You know how it bores me when you go on that way."

"When you going to marry me?"

"George, if you don't stop talking that way I'll go in and dress."

He found her hand, blew the sand from it and kissed it.

"I'm dead serious, kid. This has been the most wonderful summer of my life. You've made me everything I am, Zelda. I didn't have any savvy until I knew you. . . . Oh, G-god, Zelda, you don't know how I love you!"

"You make me terribly uncomfortable when you talk like this."

"But, Zel', I can't help loving you. You were born to have men love you."

"You're silly."

"But I love you."

"You *think* you do."

"My God, how can you say such a thing! How can you doubt such devotion! I, who would gladly lay down my life for you, who would cast myself from a cliff with my eyes blindfolded and my hands tied behind my back to win a smile from you! I, who would——"

"Oh, George, for Heaven's sake!"

"Well, I *would!* I'd do all the things for you. I'd die for you gladly, willingly, if I could make you happy, —and you have the nerve to tell me I *think* I love you! What do you know of love any way? You've never had an emotion in that ice-packed heart of yours. Love! You haven't the faintest conception of the meaning of the word. I doubt if you ever will! . . . Oh, God! God! It would be *my* fate, me with a heart like mine, me with the capacity of infinite suffering and infinite loving, to care for a girl who hasn't an ounce of feeling in her whole make-up, who doesn't know love, will never know love——"

"Oh, you bore me to death."

"That's it! You tell a man who is pouring out his whole heart to you, who throws himself prostrate at your feet, who offers his heart, his hand, his life, you tell him he bores you!"

"Well, you do, and I am going in to dress."

"Zelda!"

"I can't stand it. I'm going."

"Please—*please* don't."

"Yes, I'm going in. Where's my comb?"

"Ah, sweetheart, you stab me!"

"I hope I do, and I hope I stab you where it hurts."

"Devil!"

"You make me so mad! You spoil an otherwise happy day with all this nonsense."

"I know, I know. I love you so, that's my only excuse."

"If you really loved me, you wouldn't annoy me."

"Does it annoy you to have me tell you I love you?"

"Yes, it does. Most emphatically."

"And you don't love me?"

"No, I do not, and you know it."

"But you will, you'll learn to love me."

"*Never.*"

"Ah, God!"

"Now if you're going to start in again, I'm going to leave you."

"Death, death! The cup! The dagger! Welcome, Charon!"

"Oh, you're a fool! I'm going back to New York."

"No, no, Zelda,—don't go, don't leave me. I'll be good, Zelda, truly I'll be good. I swear it, Zelda. I take oath. I pledge you my sacred word."

§ 4

A Military Band, forty strong, was playing in front of the Manhattan Beach Hotel. A strip of lawn and garden separated the wooden steps to the rambling structure from the boardwalk that followed the line of the beach. There were no bathers here, children wearied from play sprawled in the sand, idling couples rested on some scattered logs listening to the music, gulls sailed by slowly overhead, wheeling indolently with a few lazy flops of their wings, the waves gathered, mounted, curled, crashed, slid smoothly out over the hard wet sand, marking a muffled beat to the blare of the band. Along the boardwalk columns of people promenaded past the hotel conscious of the inspection from the crowded benches along the walks. "Blaa" went the music, "crash—boom—blaa. Bang-g-g-g!" The conductor concluded the march on a burst of sound, a long

sustained note, then *"Boom"*—finish! A smattering of hand clapping, the sound of voices again, the sluggish, methodical thud and wash of the surf, the click-clicking of heels on the boardwalk and hard pavement,—feet —feet—feet, thousands of sauntering feet.

As the musicians began to put away their instruments, there was a noticeable movement on the part of the crowd; the benches emptied, the children and the loungers on the beach disappeared, the column of promenaders thinned. Presently the white shirt front of a man or two in evening dress appeared upon the verandah of the hotel, there was a rustle of silk, bare throats and shoulders lightly covered with tulle scarves; the tables began to fill, there was a mounting hum of small sounds, swelling perceptibly, more people arriving, emerging from the doorways of the hotel, ascending the steps. In a surprisingly short time there was not a seat vacant.

George and Zelda occupied one of the small tables next the rail. It was seven o'clock; the afternoon light still hung on, twilight had not yet come. The pale half disk of an uncertain moon hung in the sky and shadows were still indefinite. A smell of salt and sea scented the air, the smell of sachet and cooked food, and the smell, too, of evening after a hot day. The ocean rolled in with dull monotony. A muffled droning of great crowds and distant noises came from the direction of the amusement parks, and near at hand an orchestra hidden behind a screen of palms whined agreeably and encouraged a pleasant murmur of voices and laughter.

George was in an expansive mood. His cocktails had warmed him, and Zelda listened, not particularly attentive but mildly diverted. He was overflowing with stage gossip, with tips of theatrical ventures which would shortly go into rehearsal. He gleaned his knowledge in some curious unfathomable way, and he was always certain it was reliable. Zelda felt herself on the outermost skirts of a world with which he appeared to live

in the utmost familiarity. He was an exaggerator, a romancer, a liar; she knew him to be all of these, yet he interested her with his easy chatter and intimate discourse of a life of which she hungered to be a part. He was in gay humor this evening, one of those occasions when his spirits soared, when he saw the world and the future through bright, rose-tinted glasses. Magnificently he ordered wine, bade the waiter unwrap the napkin so that he might read the label to be sure it was the vintage he had stipulated.

She watched him drain his glass. A recollection of times when she had sat opposite Boylston at dinner came back to her unpleasantly.

"Don't drink too much, George," she cautioned. "You know you're never so amusing as when you're sober."

"Aw, don't you worry about me, kid. I'm not going to get woozey. You and I're just going to finish what's left in the bottle and then we'll go dance and catch a car. . . . Hasn't this been a wonderful day, Zel', a wonderful, wonderful day? I ask you. Every damn day I spend with you is wonderful. Pretty soon it's going to be that way all the time. We aren't going to bust up after a day like to-day. . . . You're going to marry me."

"I'm not going to marry anybody, George, until I get somewhere on the stage."

"Well, that will come before you know it."

"How do you know? What makes you think so?"

"Because I think you got oodles of ability. You need experience, that's all. You're awfully pretty, you got the right height, the right kind of a figger and a good voice. You ought to have heard what Henry Meserve said about you one day——"

"What did he say?"

"Why, he said, he told Billy Winship one night,—they were having a drink—I remember it was at the bar in the Fort Pitt——"

"Well, what was it?"

"Why, he said you had the makings of a great actress in you; he said you were bound to go over; he said all you needed was coaching and training. . . . Gee, Zel', if you'd only marry me, I could make you everything you want to be. I got the training and the experience and I could teach you."

"And after I learned?" she asked ironically.

"Aw, then, I guess after you were a great success and everybody was crowdin' to see Zelda Marsh, you'd throw me over." He scowled a little, realizing she was making fun of him.

But there was a queer light in Zelda's eyes. They were fixed out into the night, out upon the moon-ridden sky, over the tops of the yellow globes along the boardwalk where still a few people meandered up and down, but she saw neither the yellow globes nor the straggling crowd, the moon-ridden sky nor the glittering sea beneath. There against the black heavens was the entrance of a theatre and above it in brilliant electric lights: "ZELDA MARSH." She could see it, see the gaudy posters, the carriages and automobiles driving up to the curb, the eager audience streaming in.

"G-god, Zelda, you look beautiful like that! What're you thinking about? . . . Marrying me, huh?"

She turned her eyes upon him still full of her vision, and smiled dreamily.

"No, Georgie, I'm not thinking of marrying you or of marrying anybody. I'm never going to marry. I'm going to *do* something and *be* something on the stage."

§ 5

But it was one thing to speak so confidently, to have a firm conviction that some day her cherished hopes would all be realized, and quite another to gain the first foothold on the ladder that would lead to fame and fortune. So Zelda found herself thinking the next morning as peering at her reflection in her mirror, she

wiped the remnant of last night's cold cream carefully from her face. It was the cold cream that had brought these disquieting thoughts so early in the morning. She remembered how confidently she had turned from the vision of her blazing name against the sky to George's flushed, admiring face opposite hers. At the moment success, preferment, fame, had seemed so easy to grasp; hard work, perseverance, self-denial, no "cutting-up," flirting, nor drinking. Virtue always earned its own reward. But now the cold cream was gone, and it was expensive; Ned had recommended it, and she, Zelda, had used the last of it on her face the night before. It had not worried her then. Everything had seemed rosy last night. It was listening to George with his confident talk, and then they *had* had a good time: a delightful day on the beach, the dinner, the wine, dancing at Luna and the leisurely, pleasant ride home, moonshine, the deserted street, the last ten minutes of lingering talk on the steps. He had kissed her good night and for the first time in their acquaintance she had freely given him her lips. . . .

Well, all that had nothing to do with the fact that she had used the last of her cold cream and it cost two-dollars-and-a-half a jar. She couldn't afford any more of it. She wondered if she was right about the amount of money that was left. She unlocked her trunk and took out the tin box, counting the greenbacks, carefully smoothing them out, and making little piles of the coins on the edge of the bureau. . . . She was correct to the last penny. . . . Not enough. . . . By eating more cautiously she ought to make it last three weeks, might stretch it to four. If she skimped too much, however, it would show in her face and she did not dare let herself grow emaciated. Madame Boulanger would trust her, of course, but what was at the end? Suppose she didn't get any kind of an engagement? . . . Well. . . .

That sort of worry was foolish. Something was sure to come her way. It wasn't every girl who had been

with the Henry and Olivia Meserves for six months. . . .

A little after ten, she started out to make her wearisome call on the agencies. To-day she decided to vary her customary route and go first to Mrs. Bryan's. A motley group stood in front of that lady's office as she approached, a rowdy set for the most part, girls with huge Merry Widow hats perched on top of enormous pompadours, and wearing the tightest of skirts to emphasize the contours of legs and thigh. Sallow youths with sly weak faces stood talking to them and Zelda felt the eyes of many follow her as she mounted the stairs. There was a score of men and women of varying ages in the office, actor types, all with the same anxious look, a little seedy of appearance, waiting on benches ranged against the wall. They glanced indifferently at the girl as she entered and a few nodded. They knew her; she was one of themselves. Advancing to the little window on the further side of the room, she smiled ingratiatingly at the woman behind it. Ordinarily this impassive person merely shook her head to her unvoiced query, but to-day there was an interest in her eye.

"Marsh, isn't it?" she asked. "Thought I had it right. . . . Have a seat, Miss Marsh. Mrs. Bryan wants to see you."

A large, bald-headed man offered Zelda his seat. She accepted it with only a curt acknowledgment for her heart had quickened to a rapid beat, and her thoughts were racing. A nervous interval followed, an interval of twisting fingers and dry throat in which wild hopes rose tumultuously in her heart and swift visions came to her of hurrying home to tell the good news, whatever it might be, to Madame, of announcing it to George when next she saw him, of triumphantly informing John.

A red-haired boy with a hard young voice threw open a flimsy door.

"Miss Marsh."

Zelda rose shakily and followed him.

Mrs. Bryan's eyes gave her a close, shrewd inspection as she entered.

"Well, my dear, come in and sit down. I think I've something nice for you at last," she began encouragingly.

Zelda listened breathlessly for a minute or two, then her heart slowly sank—sank—sank. Mrs. Bryan kept reassuring her. The part was a nice "bit"; it had nothing whatever to do with the "merry-merry." Zelda, watching her intently, decided it was a great deal worse.

"It's burlesque, isn't it?" she faltered.

"Well, it isn't that exactly. You know the kind of thing Zabriskie does. He wouldn't be flattered to hear you call it burlesque."

"It means the road?"

"Yes, he'll probably take it on tour."

Zelda shook her head slowly, her eyes still fixed on the other's face.

"Well, it's a good job and good money. I've got plenty of girls ready to snap it up. Zabriskie's shows aren't flops."

"But it wouldn't get me anywhere, Mrs. Bryan. I have to make a reputation. I want something that will help to establish me on the stage."

A patient smile came to Mrs. Bryan's lips; she nodded, but she was not listening; Zelda rose, murmuring thanks.

"I'll bear you in mind," Mrs. Bryan said sweetly; "keep in touch with us. Come in next week." She dismissed the girl with a final nod.

Zelda made her way once more to the sweltering street. It was going to be another hot day, hotter even than the one before. She moved slowly to keep her collar from wilting, and paused in a shop's open doorway to pass a fold of her handkerchief carefully beneath the linen about her neck. A cool current blew upon

her from the shop's interior. It was a candy store and electric fans spun noiselessly bearing on the iced air the sweet odor of chemically flavored ice cream. Two girls at the marble counter of the soda fountain sucked straws plunged into the depths of tall, frosted glasses, A pang of longing came to Zelda, but she turned sharply away and hugged the scant shadows in the street again.

At Josephson's, an irritable clerk looked up from his typewriter long enough to give her a brief, identifying look and to say brusquely:

"Skidoo—skidoo. Booked up to-day; call to-morrow."

Zelda listened blankly to the rattle of his machine for a moment, then went her way.

There were more familiar faces among the mob that filled the anteroom at Hamilton Blake's. Zelda knew a few of them by name,—actors and actresses of some reputation. It was a shock to find Waldo Lazaro here. In her room in the Fuller Building she had had his picture cut from a magazine pinned to her wall. But now he waited with the rest. They all waited. Perhaps for a word with Mr. Blake; perhaps for the sudden summons; perhaps for the idle gossip for which they all had a passionate eagerness. They whispered in groups, confiding to one another rumors of new shows about to be cast and managers' plans that were afloat. Hardly a head turned as Zelda entered. These people were a cut above the clientele of Mrs. Bryan. Zelda was just one of hundreds who drifted in. Near the door sat a stout, middle-aged woman fanning herself with her handkerchief and breathing audibly.

"Fierce, ain't it?" she said to Zelda. "My Gawd, I don't see why Blake don't get some ventilation in this room. Every penny he makes, he gets off us folk and he treats us like cattle."

A coatless clerk opened an inner door. There was an instant hush. Heads came up, eyes flashed his way.

"Mr. Hemingway? . . . Mr. Irving Hemingway

here?" Silence. His glance swept the room: the door clapped shut; the murmuring voices recommenced.

"What are you after, dearie?" the stout woman questioned.

"Oh, anything," Zelda answered wearily. Her glance, too, went about the crowded room, the warm, glistening faces close together, whispering and nodding, eyes that strove to hide the anxious look behind them turning involuntarily toward the connecting door at every faint sound from within, and photographs, photographs, photographs, covering the four walls. "To Hamilton Blake,—gratefully Harriet Carleton," "To my friend and adviser, Hamilton Blake,—Olga Sorella," "Hamilton Blake, with best wishes—Lester Frost," Zelda had read them all before; Harriet Carleton and Lester Frost were famous now; she had never heard of Olga Sorella. All began here presumably, waiting as she was waiting on a hot summer day in the stifling office for the word to come that she was wanted. But to-day was unusually dispiriting it seemed to her. She was hungry. Coffee and crackers that morning; nothing else. It was half-past one now, and her head ached. It was foolish to have come to Blake's as late as this; if she called at all, it would have been wiser to arrive at eleven or perhaps even earlier, when practically nobody would be there. She turned to slip unobtrusively away when there was a sudden stir, the outer door,—the door from the hall,—burst open and in swept a woman in a brilliantly embroidered linen costume, a flaring hat of red feathers, a tall parasol in one hand, a Pekinese pug caught up in the other; it was a dramatic entrance, and instant silence once more hushed the room. Head high, arrogantly, the woman surveyed the staring ring of faces, then regally proceeded to the further door, rapped smartly upon its frosted pane, opened it without hesitation, and vanished within. Even after she was gone, the hush lingered for a moment or

two. Zelda, her eyes fastened to the door through which the actress had disappeared, stood awed and fascinated.

"Anna Hernandez," the stout woman with the handkerchief informed her.

"Whew-w-w—" somebody breathed; from a corner came a flippant whistle. Then the murmuring recommenced. Zelda turned to the hall door, passed to the landing and with heavy steps descended to the street.

Anna Hernandez, a Weber and Fields headliner! An intimate glimpse of a church prelate could not have meant more to a devout convent girl, than did this fleeting vision of the Broadway idol to Zelda Marsh.

Mechanically she made her way up that teeming thoroughfare. There was no deference here to the humidity or heat. Wagons, cabs, trucks, automobiles, rattled, banged and weaved their trundling courses through the tangles at cross streets; the sidewalks were crowded, pedestrians jostling one another, hurrying, preoccupied, intent purposes stamped upon their perspiring faces. Zelda, hugging the shadows, gazed enviously upon them. The aching wish to be of their number, to belong rightfully to this eager procession, twisted her heart with pain. For a moment, the sharpness of it dizzied her. Her lips quivered. She *had* to succeed, she whispered to herself; somehow, some way she *must* break in.

CHAPTER III

§ 1

When first she came to New York, Zelda had loved every phase of the great city, the crowds, the buildings, its gigantic proportions, its very heat. Now it began to appall, to frighten her. A weight seemed to be gathering upon her back. The sensation at times was amazingly vivid. She felt that if she made sufficient effort and straightened herself, she would be free from it. Her days were lonely, empty of any real occupation except the dreary calls at the agencies. There was nothing to do but to wait. Jobless, unemployed, that fact was ever with her. How to get a start, how to find someone who would give her a tryout, a small part, a maid's part, anything. Her heart was desperately set upon the stage. She loved its atmosphere, its excitement, the very smell of grease paint. She read and re-read every item of news concerning plays, players, and managers' plans in the papers and theatrical magazines. These she borrowed where she could; she had no money for periodicals; she had less and less even for essentials. Thirty dollars, twenty-one-fifty, fifteen-thirty-five, the last ten-dollar bill. Madame Boulanger's room rent again; payday came round so fast. Long since, she had moved to a tiny chamber on the fourth floor at the back.

Yet, in spite of her depression, she maintained a cheerful exterior, was gay, always ready to laugh, optimistic. No one suspected; she was determined no one should ever suspect. She was a little thinner perhaps, weighed less than at any time for several years, but then thinness was conducive to health. Boylston had told her so many times. She was often hungry, but many

women inclined to fleshiness were that from choice. No; she had no reason to complain. Her chance would come, sooner or later she would get a small part, and if she didn't, well, she could always cook for a living; there were thousands of restaurants, boarding houses in the city. Her father's daughter, why shouldn't she turn cook?

During the late September days, she was a great deal alone. George had an engagement, a secondary rôle in a musical comedy, the Captain of the Guard, and had one good solo to sing. For three weeks he had rehearsed day and night, and was now off with the show for a try-out in Philadelphia; two weeks there, two weeks in Atlantic City, New York probably by November first. He mailed her frequent postals, sent an occasional telegram, and one Sunday Madame Boulanger lumbered upstairs to tell her Philadelphia wanted her on the telephone. It was George, of course, buoyant, voluble, full of himself, his affairs, vehemently asserting how much he missed her, but not one inquiry about her health, or her fortunes.

It was a bit surprising to Zelda to discover how much she had grown to depend on George. While he was in the city rehearsing and had been unable to take her out in the evenings or to Coney Island for the day, she had felt more or less at a loose end, but when he quitted the city for Philadelphia, she experienced a loneliness entirely unexpected. She found herself actually counting the days until 'The Hottentot Princess' should begin its New York engagement. George Selby? . . . No, decidedly she had no sentimental attachment for George, but he enormously cheered her when he was about, and she knew he cared for her. Boastful, blatant, boisterous, often provoking to an almost unbearable degree, he was nevertheless her best friend these days, and he was always devoted, unflaggingly attentive.

There was John, of course, and Zelda sometimes wondered just what would become of her if John, too,

should suddenly take it into his head to go away. . . . Probably marry, or accept the transient hospitality of the sleek, well-dressed, smallish individual who lived across the street, a dapper, wrinkled, bald-headed little man, who tried to ogle her whenever they chanced to meet, and who could easily be encouraged, she knew, to more intimate relations.

In the meantime John, faithful, friendly, honest John, with goodness emanating from him, and enveloping him, stupid goodness! It was just this odd quality of goodness about John, Zelda sometimes thought, that kept hope in her heart, faith in herself, and, in moments of despair, prevented her from some recklessness,—John, who knew all about her, her history, the black chapters in her life, yet who loved, admired and believed in her notwithstanding.

"You look kind of tired, Miss Zelda. Guess it's the hot weather we've been having. Late for this time of the year. They say it's the humidity that gets you, the moisture in the air, you know, not the heat."

"Oh, I'm all right, John. It's this rotten business of chasing a job. But my worries are about over, I believe. Bryan's got something lined up for me, she says, and I read for Farquharson Monday, and he's promised to let me know, and I got a note from Ned yesterday. She wants me to come up and visit her next week at their lodge or camp or something like that, in Maine. I'll go if nothing breaks here. That connection's pretty good, you know. I don't want to let it die, and though Henry and Ned are going to do nothing this winter, Ned says they'll probably go out on a short road tour next spring."

All of which was true enough except that she had no intention of accepting the invitation; she had not the clothes for such a visit, nor even the railroad fare. The promise of the Bryan job was true too, but it had been no more of a promise than that worthy lady made every time Zelda called. As for Dean Farquharson, she

actually had read for him at the Bijou one day, but that had been more than a fortnight ago, and she had heard nothing more from him. Moreover she had told John all about this already, but that she had forgotten. There were times of late when moments of giddiness came to her and she was not altogether sure of her steps.

"Well, I hope something comes your way pretty soon," John said. "This theatrical game is the most uncertain business in the world. It was too much for me. There are all sorts of ups and downs in it; sometimes you're way up and sometimes. . . ."

He stopped, leaving the sentence unfinished, a trick he had that always annoyed Zelda. They were standing at the foot of Madame Boulanger's chipped brownstone front steps where they had chanced to meet, Zelda returning from profitless calls at Josephson's, Mrs. Bryan's and Hamilton Blake's, John leaving the house, an enormous, heavy black valise in his hands. Zelda had often seen him with it, and wondered what it was John continually lugged in and out of the house, and that weighed so much. She asked about it now. At once his face turned a coppery crimson; he was acutely embarrassed.

"Oh, just some old books," he explained awkwardly; "law books. I do some copying for a—a lawyer friend of mine." He went on with a clumsy account of just what the work was and how he happened to be doing it. It was an elaborate fabrication, the girl knew. She could not follow him; his long, halting account made her impatient and nervous, her head was aching and one of those giddy spells was upon her. She was thinking of the cup of hot tea she had planned to make for herself as soon as she had reached her room. She could see herself preparing it, setting up the stove, filling the diminutive kettle, shaking the lamp to be sure there was alcohol enough, lighting the wick; she could see herself dishing the gray curly leaves in a teaspoon from the lead-wrapped tea package into the white bottom of the

china teapot, and then reaching for the steaming kettle, pouring the water in an arc from its nozzle into the pot. Suddenly the fragrant odor of hot tea came to her, strong, fragrant, delicious. . . .

John had an arm about her, one big hand grasping her wrist; otherwise she would have fallen. How silly, how ridiculous of her to make such an exhibition of herself! John, kind-faced, homely John, was peering at her in apprehension as if she had actually fainted!

"*Miss Zelda! . . . Miss Zelda! . . .*"

"Hush, John. I'm all right." It was in normal tones she spoke, her usual cheery voice. She straightened herself, half-laughing. "Don't be a goose; there's nothing the matter with me. I just got a headache, that's all."

"You—you—you——"

"Hush. You're attracting attention."

"Shall I get a doctor?"

"Nonsense."

"Let me take you into the house. . . . I'll run to the drug store. Aromatic spirits of ammonia. . . ."

"There's nothing the matter with me, I tell you."

"Yes, yes, there is. Y—you f—fainted right here before my eyes."

"Ridiculous. I'm quite all right. I'll go up and lie down. Don't be an old sil', John."

"But, Miss Zelda. . . ."

"Stop it, John; you really *will* make me ill."

"But I know. . . ."

"Know what?" She was fully herself now, and looked at him puzzled.

"I . . . you're . . . you're . . ."

She waited, impatience growing. He floundered helplessly, his face working. Suddenly she guessed what troubled him, and embarrassment flooded her also, more for him than for herself. He suspected she was hungry. They looked steadily into each other's eyes for a moment, the man's face congested, the girl's mind

passing from one quick thought to another. She laid a hand affectionately on his arm.

"John dear," she said, "I guess I *am* a little tired, too much yesterday and to-day's been fierce; my head's actually splitting. . . . Do you want to be a dear and take me somewhere for tea? It's after two now, and I'd love tea and sandwiches. I haven't had a bite since early this morning, and I'm really ravenous. Guess that's what's the matter with me; I'm just plain hungry."

It was pathetic to watch the effect of her words; joy transfigured his face; it was like the sun coming up in the morning. She caught his hand eagerly.

"You don't mind blowing me to tea, do you, John? It won't break you, will it? . . . I suppose Maccini's 'cross the way wouldn't have a thing at this hour. Spaghetti maybe, but I don't want spaghetti. Let's find a restaurant nearby where we can have tea and one of those bacon, chicken and lettuce sandwiches all smeared with mayonnaise. Oh, John, that will be fun! Leave your old bulky bag inside, and come along."

§ 2

John lent her money, nine dollars. She suspected it was all he had. It was sufficient for one week's back room rent, sufficient for one to come, a little, a very little for food. Her clothes were shabby now, her hat was still her summer's straw. Her shoes, too, were worn out. She needed no one to tell her what kind of an impression she made when she presented herself at the agencies. She had seen too many girls there looking as she did now.

One afternoon she shut her mind to sensibility, went determinedly across the street to the basement door of Maccini's restaurant and asked for the proprietor. His broad-hipped, big-bosomed wife came in response, and

with cold, dark, uninterested eyes, stared at her from behind the iron grille of the inside door as Zelda made her halting request. A warm odor of wine, and a savory smell of cooking came from the cavernous black interior behind the woman. She received only a curt head shake and a broad back; not a word, not even a grunt.

Next there was "Childs." At the first noisy, white-tiled restaurant where Zelda applied, she was referred to the general offices on Broadway far down town. It was a long trip. There was a regular school for cooks employed by "Childs," she was informed; most of the positions were held by men; if she wanted a waitress's job, she could send in her application but this must be accompanied by letters from two well-known persons who would be able to vouch for her. There were no vacancies at present.

At a cheap but clean looking restaurant on Sixth Avenue which seemed at the moment deserted and into which she found sufficient courage to enter, she was faced by a pockmarked Greek who grinned at her leeringly and jerked his head invitingly toward regions within. At another, the Jewish proprietor drove her hurriedly away with shouts of "kosher kitchen."

Want ads under "Help Wanted—Female" in the daily papers. Private families mostly; "kitchen helper for small hotel"; "scullery maid"; "dish-washer"; "the right party with capital to invest to take charge of culinary end in well-paying long-established road house"; "Cook, hospital or institution experience"; "Cook, kosher restaurant"; "Cook, country hotel. . . ." Well, that was what she was best fitted for. Where was it? Passaic. She had never heard of the town.

"Dressmakers,"—"Girls to learn dressmaking,"—seamstress,—seamstress,—seamstress—— She knew about these: backbreaking jobs at sewing machines in clothing-manufacturers' lofts. . . .

What did a girl do without money and without friends in New York? One didn't starve to death. It never came to that. There was a good deal of talk in the newspapers and magazines about whether or not a girl could live on five or six dollars a week and be respectable, but she was perfectly willing to put that to a test later; first land the five or six dollars a week. There must be agencies, bureaus, institutions designed to meet the needs of just such cases as hers. She was willing to work; she had never been afraid of work.

On a certain morning, she conquered her reluctance and entered a Y. W. C. A. building, whose location she had happened to remember. By mistake, she found herself at the executive headquarters. She was directed to a branch where she was informed she would find an employment bureau. But here the surprisingly intimate questions asked, and the references demanded, frightened her away.

At night in her tiny room under the roof, she would lie awake for long hours. No matter what the time, through the thin wooden partition next her bed, she could hear old Mrs. Sessions, her neighbor, making curious scratching noises. What the withered little creature was about, Zelda could form no idea. Water pipes gurgled and clanked when faucets downstairs were turned off and on. Occasionally when an elevated train thundered along its trestle a block away, a fine tremor shook the house. Voices sometimes reached her, catcalls, a woman's wild laugh, arguments that died away in murmurs and unexpectedly broke forth again; a man and wife quarrelling in the room below; someone practising on his concertina. Those sounds gradually faded into a silence, only the roar of the elevated at less and less frequent intervals, and the murmur of the city about her, like the subdued throbbing of a great heart. Often a long draught of cold water would stop the gnawing in her stomach, still it long enough for her to get to sleep.

§ 3

And then, one Sunday morning when there was the first real nip of autumn in the air, George Selby returned unexpectedly to town.

"We closed last night in Atlantic City," he told her. "It was the rottenest outfit I've ever been with. Kenyon, the director, was an old grouch, and Dudley scrapped with everybody in the cast. The music was punk and there wasn't a good laugh in the show. I told 'em long ago, we'd never get to New York. A flop from the beginning, but they couldn't see further than the end of their noses. . . . Say, Zel', what's the matter, kid? You look rotten."

It was splendid to see George again. When Ronnie, the slatternly colored maid, screamed up from the floor below that Mr. Selby was waiting, Zelda had paused only long enough to dab powder on her nose, run a comb once or twice through her pompadour, before plunging down the three flights and flinging herself into his arms. She had not realized how much his return was going to mean to her.

"George—George! I *am* glad to see you!"

"Ah, Zel', that's bully. . . . Gee, I'm glad to see *you.*"

He told her about the show's closing. His arms around her were strong and comforting; hers were about his neck; his cheek was cool and healthy; there was a good, clean smell about him; his lips were loving and sweet as he pressed them against her own.

"Ah, kid, I've missed you so!"

"Have you, George?"

"Oh, G-god! Miss you? I've dreamed about you every night, and every minute of the day you've haunted my brain. . . . Zel', you don't know, you don't know. I've been starving for you, kid."

"George!"

"I just can't get along without you. The instant we

got our notices, I rushed back to the hotel, dumped my things into a suitcase and caught the midnight for New York. I got here at four this morning, went to the Imperial, and came straight to you as soon as I woke up. Let's go out to Claremont and breakfast. I thought maybe I'd get here early before you had yours, and we could eat it together. You haven't breakfasted yet, have you?"

"Breakfasted?" She laughed shakily, and as she gazed into his young, eager, handsome face so near her own, sudden tears came to her.

"Zel'!"

Through the mist that blinded her, she smiled happily.

"What's the matter, kid?"

"Nothing. . . . Just glad, I guess, because you're back."

"Then, you *do* love me, Zel'? A little, hey? Ah, say you do, say you've learned to care a little."

"I don't know, George, I—I don't know about that, but I *do* know I'm gladder to see you than anybody I've ever known."

"Zel'!"

He took her strongly in his arms again, and crushed her to him, his lips on hers, and a wave of happiness flooded her as she gave herself wholly to the embrace.

§ 4

The restaurant was almost empty, a group or two in the corners, three men with heads close together arguing, a family with two small girls, sightseers, studying a colored map. The wide porch was glassed-in and spotted with tables. Snowy napery predominated, glittering with glass and cutlery; here and there, sprays of asters in silver vases, waiters hovering in the background.

"Oh, George,—isn't this expensive? Don't you think we'd better——"

"Ssssh, I'm lousy, kid, rolling in wealth. Nothing's too good for you. . . ."

A small table on the far side overlooking the water beckoned them. The wooded Jersey shore beyond the blue expanse of river was rich with the royal reds, browns and gold of autumn, while down below at the base of the precipitous bank, lay the broad Hudson, dotted with the glint of white sails. A scow, towed by a puffing tug, cut diagonally across the tide; a Sunday excursion steamer, flags flying, her decks black with people, headed upstream; white and glistening at her anchor rode a United States man-of-war, navy launches busily chugging back and forth to shore, carrying Sunday visitors. Life and gaiety filled the river; there was a sense of holiday, of pleasure-taking in the air.

"Melon first, hey, Zel'?" George was saying. "Maybe you'd like grape-fruit? How 'bout grape-fruit? Like that?"

"Oh, anything."

"Then we'll have grape-fruit." He busied himself with his order to the waiter at his elbow. "And a cocktail, hey, Zel'? How 'bout a cocktail first? Little ole Martini? What you say?"

"Sure; anything."

Her gaze was upon the river, watching its color and its beauty. Again the mist came to her eyes. All the pleasing prospect blurred, the sunshine glittered. George, babbling of his recent show and late experiences, checked himself abruptly.

"Why, what's the matter, kid? . . . Look at me. . . . Why, you're crying!"

She shook her eyes free from tears and turned upon him a smiling face, full of real happiness. A plate of rolls was upon the table before her; the waiter had just placed it there. Deliberately she reached for one, broke it casually, and with unhurried movement dipped the point of a knife into a butter ball and smeared the crust. She could not keep the knife from trembling, and

George's eyes were observing her. But his solicitous inquiries drew from her only elusive answers.

Presently he was off again; anecdotes of the road, some of his own clever repartees, encounters in which he had figured to advantage, stories, many of which he had told her before. Laggingly the food appeared, the eggs, the hot muffins, eventually the coffee, the good, hot, soul-satisfying, strength-giving coffee, the heartening, revivifying coffee, to be drunk in generous, luxurious draughts, to feel warmly in one's stomach, to fill one's cup with anew: more coffee, more cream, more sugar. . . . Another pot? Why yes, she believed she would.

A sense of well being, of contentment came to Zelda. The sun was warm on her back, and fell pleasantly upon the table cloth; the restaurant was deserted, quiet; the river just below the terrace, a gracious sweep, bright with color and with life, and George, opposite her, a cigarette between his fingers, his eyes squinted and his head on one side to avoid the smoke, telling her in his enthusiastic, emphatic way the story of a quarrel, one of the kindest, handsomest, most generous men in the world, a man to be envied among his fellows, a man who needed mellowing, that was all, a woman's, a devoted woman's influence, to awaken his better nature, one who would go far in the world, in the theatrical profession or indeed in any other.

"But don't you think that was foolish, George," she interrupted him to say. "Dean Farquharson probably doesn't know you exist, probably has never heard of your name, but you can be certain his stage manager and everybody connected with his office who was present at the time will remind him just what you did."

"Well, he had no business to keep me waiting."

"But it is possible he didn't know you were in the theatre and, if he did, what of it? Suppose he *did* keep you waiting an hour, two hours, what an argument you'd have to awaken his interest! He was terribly

sorry, of course, when he heard what had happened, but when you acted that way, he just dismissed you from his mind, and thought you were a very touchy young man."

"Maybe," George admitted, scowling at the cigarette in his hand. "I guess I kind of flew off the handle."

"It doesn't ever do for an actor to antagonize a manager; you want to remember they do the employing, and we're absolutely dependent on their favor. If you're treated badly the only thing for you to do is to gulp and bear it. Now you can wait a good long time before you ever get a call from Farquharson's office; he'll never give you a job no matter how badly he needs you."

George continued to glower at his cigarette.

"Guess you're right. I suppose I've been all sorts of a damn fool."

"Well, I think you're a dear one," she said quietly; "dear and—foolish."

"I don't care how foolish, if you think I'm dear, just a little."

"And now, what will you do with yourself this winter?"

"Oh, there's plenty of new shows. All the managers know about me. They'll be after me inside of a week; you'll see. I'll have a job before the week's out."

No doubt he was right. Egotistical or not, he would be re-employed at once, probably in a road show, and he'd be gone again, and she . . . ? She'd be alone once more, alone to face the world as best she could.

He half guessed what was passing in her mind, and reached out a quick hand across the table to take one of hers.

"Zel' darling, why don't you marry me? I'll always make enough for two, and you'd help me save money, keep me from doing damn fool things. If I go on the road, you'd go with me, maybe we'd play in the same show, and if I stay in New York, we'll get a small apartment together."

His eager words hung in the air; he bent across the table, his large, warm hand on hers, his eyes searching her face. She did not meet his look, but her throat thickened and there was a flutter in her heart. She was thinking it would be a comfort to have George to turn to if trouble came, to have him belong to her whether he was in the city or not, to have him care what happened to her, to have him to confide in; it would be a satisfaction, to take a hand in his affairs, to counsel and advise him; and it would be pleasant too, to feel that their companionship which had always been congenial and harmonious, would go on indefinitely. George and herself, married, man and wife! Good friends. A good team. She was so tired, so terribly tired of trying to live. It was foolish to think she could make a success on the stage . . . thousands of girls . . . like her . . . every one of them wanting what she wanted and believing they could act.

"Listen, Zel', I've got a scheme; I've been thinking a lot lately. If you'll marry me, I've got an idea. Did you ever think of vaudeville? Did you ever think of trying the circuits? . . . Well, now, listen here."

He hunched his chair closer to the table, and with his hand still covering hers, went on to explain. He had a plot for a vaudeville sketch, just two characters. It wasn't what you'd call "art," and it didn't call for any particular high-class acting, but you couldn't put things like that over with a vaudeville audience. The "act" had a dog and a cat in it,—real, live animals; he knew just where he could get the dog, and it wouldn't be difficult to locate a cat. There would be a man and a woman in the sketch, husband and wife, or maybe he'd have them just sweethearts; anyway, the girl would own the dog and the man the cat, but neither one of them would know the other had a pet, and this would lead to a misunderstanding, a chance for a lot of jokes; there would be a happy reconciliation, of course, when the truth came out.

"Y'see, kid, you're the girl, let's say, and you write me

a letter; you're talking about the dog, d'y'see, and you suppose I know all about him. You say: 'I went out for a walk with Buster to-day,'—that's the dog's name, —'and I guess he loves me better than anybody in the world; he went to sleep in my arms,' or 'he put his head in my lap,' or 'he seemed kind of tired when we got home, so I took him up to my room, made him lie down on my bed, and was nice to him.' You see what I mean? Nothing raw, you know, just kinda so-so, enough to get a laugh. And then you get a letter from me. The cat's name is 'Baby' and I write you: 'Baby was waiting for me in the garden last night. She's the prettiest little creature in the world, and so loving. She puts her little pink mouth up to mine every once in a while, and I can't keep from kissing her. She has the bluest eyes and the pinkest ears, and she sleeps with me every night.' "

He went on expounding his plans, growing more and more excited as his enthusiasm increased.

"By Jove, Zel', it's a whale of an idea, I tell you. I'll bet you I sell it overnight to Proctor and Keith, or P. G. Williams, and if they don't want it, I *know* Poli will take it. I'll go talk to Bennie to-morrow. Bennie Bowie's an agent, an old friend of mine, do anything in the world for me, and Bennie'll book it, you see. Say, you haven't got the faintest idea what they'll pay for a good act. Two hundred, two hundred and fifty, three hundred! Why, they don't think a thing of paying three hundred for a sketch that will bring in the dough. When we were in Philly, there was a fellow there at one of the vaudeville houses and I've known him for a coon's age, and he's played all the circuits, and he was telling me that he makes——"

George was off again, this time with the tale he had gleaned from his vaudeville friend in Philadelphia which went to prove that the "real" money to be made was in vaudeville, and that the actor who stuck to the "legit" was nothing better than a plain sucker.

Zelda apparently listened but she heard less than

half of what he said. "George and me," she was thinking, "why not? It would solve my problem, and his too; he needs me, and I need him; we like each other, we have fun together, we spend most of our time in each other's company, why not *all* the time? . . . We ought to be really happy together."

"Don't you think that's a swell idea, Zel'?"

"Why yes, I think that ought to get over."

"Of course," he went on presently with a deprecating wave of his hand, "it isn't 'Hamlet,' or 'A Parisian Romance,' or anything like that, but I'll bet we can put it over. . . . G-god, I'd love just *once* to get a chance like Kyrle Bellew's in 'The Amateur Cracksman'! G-god, that's a fat part, and he overacts it dreadfully. . . .

"The road isn't so bad, Zelda," he continued after his thoughts had soared for a moment, "it isn't so bad after you're married, and it's cheaper than dirt if a couple can double up. We can save money, quite a respectable bit of it, and then we can take a trip over to Spain in the summer time, get a couple of bicycles and go pedalling over the country,—Madrid, Granada, and visit the old Moorish castles, and then maybe the summer after that we'll try Italy, or tramp over the Swiss Alps."

"You're like the woman with the basket of eggs," Zelda said with a laugh.

He joined her. "Well, if it's a dream, Zelda darling, there's no harm in thinking about it, is there? And we could take the first step in making it come true, by getting married to-morrow."

"H-ho——"

"I mean it. Why not?"

"I don't want to get married at all, so I hardly think I'll marry you to-morrow."

"But you *will* marry me, Zel'?"

"Oh, I don't know. I've said no enough times for you to know just how I feel——"

"But, damn it, Zel'——"

"Hush; don't swear and don't talk so loud."

"But you said, you told me you'd changed, that you'd begun to care, that you'd missed me like the deuce since I went away. . . ."

"Did I?"

"You know you did. . . . Oh, God, was there ever such a woman! I'll be damned, Zel', you're enough to drive a man crazy. Here I've been counting on your marrying me, and planning out this vaudeville sketch just so we could do it right away, and giving up any chance of a job in the 'legit'——"

"Now listen here, George, if you're going to talk that way——"

"No—no, I don't mean that; you know I don't. I don't give a hang about the theatre or anything except you. Oh, Zel', you believe that, don't you? You've just *got* to marry me, that's all. I need you, I can't get along without you, I won't amount to a hill of beans unless you marry me."

Gesticulating with decisive little motions of his hands as he leaned toward her across the table, his words poured from him in an eager rush, arguing, protesting, entreating. She liked him in this mood. She knew better than he did, how true it was he needed her. She was more necessary to him than he to her, and yet to-day, how solid, comforting and dependable he had seemed when he had suddenly appeared from nowhere, and taken her into his arms! . . . Perhaps they were necessary to each other. A happy marriage was like that, wasn't it?

"Zel', say you will, go on, say you will, Zel'. We'll get a license to-morrow, and be married the day after. Then'll have a swell little dinner in celebration and go to a hotel. . . . Ah, go on, Zel', say you will."

Should she? Part of her said yes, another no. . . . She wished she could ask John. But John would say no,

of course, and she knew she didn't want to hear no. . . . She wanted George that much, at any rate.

§ 5

It was long after midnight when, tired in mind and body but happier than she had felt for many a long day, she climbed the last flight of stairs to her own drab, ill-ventilated, tiny bedroom. The uncarpeted stair treads creaked as she ascended and gave off disconcerting cracks like pistol shots in the darkness. She undressed quickly, gave her face a brief, uneasy scrutiny in the crazed mirror of her bureau, slipped her tattered night-dress over her head, and got into bed.

It had been a long, exciting day. She and George had wandered from the restaurant, had hailed a hansom, had driven down Riverside Drive, past the rich homes of millionaires, had clop-clopped their way under the yellow and brown trees of the Park following the leaf-scattered driveways, had stopped at the Casino for a long, refreshing, ginny drink, that had been served to them with the usual chip of dry sandwich to conform with Sunday regulations, and then in a gentle, languorous glow had snuggled against each other in the seat of another cab, and continued their jogging progress down Fifth Avenue, reaching the Café Martin after seven o'clock, there had dined festively on the balcony, and George, in his most expansive, generous mood, had ordered a bottle of Sparkling Burgundy. Toward the end of the dinner, he had become a little thick of speech, as he usually did when he drank, but, at Zelda's supplication, he had contented himself with a single bottle, and they had idled over their coffee and cigarettes, the girl snatching a stolen whiff now and then. And they had talked and talked as they slowly wandered homeward, and in every dark corner or shadow, George had stopped to take her into his arms,

kissing and loving her in a big, powerful fashion till somehow his bigness and his strength had found their way into her soul and she gave her lips to him without restraint. Now she was at home, in her own bed, alone, free to review it all and to think.

Would she, should she marry George?

He was coming for her in the morning and it was arranged that they should go together to the City Hall and get the license. Still another twenty-four hours must elapse before the union could be consummated. She had to-morrow and the day after in which to make up her mind. George considered it settled, she had tacitly agreed, but there was always the last minute when she could refuse. . . . She would lose him forever in that event. She'd be sorry, oh yes, very sorry, if he went out of her life, if she never saw him again. But would she be as sorry as she might be some day if she married him? . . . George—for life! George—*always!* . . . Disconcerting, that prospect.

Her thoughts spun on.

Presently she flung back the bedclothes, fumbled for a match, lit the blackened Welsbach burner, and, blinking in the flood of garish light, studied the grinning, squinting face of the photograph in the worn morocco frame. With it in her hands, she sat upon the bed and for a long time stared, not upon it, but vacantly upon the floor before her. Then, without letting her gaze wander to her fingers, she turned the frame over, twisted to either side the small brass clasps that held the back of the frame in place; the bit of glass and the photograph fell into her hands; her lips tightened slowly; deliberately she tore the picture into small bits and tossed the handful into the slop jar beside her washstand. A catch in her breath escaped her, that was all. She made a quick reach for the light, sprang back to bed, and buried her face in the pillow, but the emotion she had expected did not come. She remained curiously calm, and presently her wheeling thoughts re-

sumed their circle and she was back again at her problem: Should she marry George? . . . Michael? Michael belonged to another self, another period of her life, he was gone, of the past, she did not want to let herself think of him. . . . To-day there was George, who wanted her to marry him. And if she did, should she tell him of the others? He knew of neither. Probably it would make a difference to him if he did know. Men were like that. But telling him of her past did not seem important to her. He had had a dozen, a score of women in his life; he boasted of his affairs, women that had "fallen for him," who had been "crazy" about him, who had sent him "mash" notes at the theatre, and whom he had subsequently known intimately and about whom he joked. She did not resent this libertinism in him particularly. George was what he was, and she knew that no matter how many other women had entered his life, she was now supreme. He loved her, loved her with all the ardor of which he was capable. . . . No, she could not feel that her previous relations with Michael nor with Boylston had anything to do with whether or not she should marry George Selby. Moreover she considered she was giving him so much, so much more than he was giving her; the sacrifice, if there was any, was hers.

Her last thoughts as she drifted off to sleep were neither of Michael, nor Boylston, nor yet of George. They were of John. . . . She did not like to think of John. . . . Poor John. . . .

§ 6

She awoke the next morning with happiness flooding her heart. He was coming for her at ten; they were to have breakfast and then go together to the City Hall. Her scanty, shabby wardrobe received her first consideration. Not a garment she owned, she thought fit to wear, and the morrow her wedding day perhaps. . . .

Would she be married on the morrow? . . . Well, why not? What else was there for her to do?

She hummed as she worked busily with her needle, and hummed as she rubbed a semblance of brightness to the worn surface of her shoes with the inside of an old glove. When the hands of the round-faced alarm clock pointed to ten o'clock and there was no sign of George, a quick fear clutched at her heart. Maybe he had changed his mind! Maybe he no longer wanted to make her his wife! . . . And when a few minutes later, came the announcement he was waiting, she reminded herself, as she flew down the stairs, of the sharpness of that first emotion, and asked if that didn't prove she loved him?

A buoyant, radiant, exuberant George, a George bubbling over with high spirits and good humor. Ah yes, he was nice, he was dear. They went off laughing hilariously together. She wondered if John, peering from his upstairs window, saw them as they went down the street, with almost a skip in their eager steps.

George had thought of a number of funny lines to be introduced into his vaudeville sketch and was enthusiastic in recounting them.

"You see, Zel', I'm talking about my pet, and I say to you: 'She's a cute little kitten,' and you say: 'Nasty old cat,' and I say: 'You've been out with that cur, again,' and you come back at me with: 'Don't you dare call Buster a cur!' Say, you know, all that's great vaudeville stuff. There's a sure-fire laugh in every one of those gags."

They went to interview Bennie Bowie and the agent seemed to think well of the sketch.

"Get it down on paper, Georgie, my boy," he counselled. "You can't do anything till you get it on paper. You got to work up those lines, and make 'em snappy. And, 'nother thing, you want to let your audience in on the know from the beginning. They've got to savvy

right from the start that you're talking about a real cat and a real dog."

"Think so?"

"Bet cher life. How soon can you show it?"

"Well, Miss Marsh here and I got to be married first."

"Oh a wedding, hey? Well, that's pretty slick work. Man and wife team, hey? Well, you save money on the road. When's it going to take place?"

They clattered down the stairway from Bennie's office, climbed to the nearest elevated station, and sat together in one of the double seats of the train with fingers linked, hidden from sight by a fold of Zelda's skirt. Happy, high-hearted, exuberant; oh, it was fun getting married! The sun shone brilliantly on the grimy façades of the brick buildings flashing past. A nip of autumn seasoned the air. It urged young blood to a faster beat, and thinned the ranks of the loafers on the benches in City Hall Park, long-haired, seedy-looking individuals with turned-up coat collars, who sat in huddled postures, scanning want ads in crumpled newssheets. The square teemed with life: pushcart venders, beside their deserted vehicles, with hands thrust deep into pockets, stamped warmth into their feet, newsboys shrilly piped early evening editions, bootblacks bent their backs busy with brush and rag, pedestrians hurrying, hurrying with alert step and urgent intent. A glance at the young man and woman making their way toward the steps of the City Hall would have told any one of them, thought Zelda self-consciously, the nature of their errand. They were going to get a marriage license! She was going to be married! She looked up at George's clean, smooth, classic-featured face and a wave of admiration and affection swept over her.

The business in the Marriage License Bureau was dispatched with almost disconcerting brevity. They stood at a counter and each filled out a questionnaire: "Name

and address,—Where and when born——" Not until that moment did she learn that George's real name was Emil Petersen.

"My grandfather was Danish," George explained. "I haven't used my real name for years."

"Mrs. Petersen," Zelda murmured, wonderingly.

"Ho, nobody will ever call you that. I hate 'Petersen.' They'll call you 'Mrs. Selby,' if they ever put a handle to your name, but in the profession, you'll be 'Zelda Marsh' just as you are now."

"Now for the ring," he announced, clapping his hand over the license where it lay in an inside pocket. "Well, I've never done this before, but it isn't so bad. . . . Y'ever been married before, Zel'?"

Her heart tightened a little, but she met his high spirits with,

"Oh, just once or twice."

At the Waldorf they lunched festively, but the fashionably dressed women at other tables routed the girl's gaiety. A dark mood of depression came to her.

"What's the matter, kid?"

She would not tell him. Not a frock, not a hat, not even a pair of decent gloves in which to go to her wedding. Vaguely she wondered if she might borrow from Madame Boulanger, . . . from John . . . Ned. Not time enough to write to Ned. To-morrow she'd be married, and to the man sitting opposite, she must look thereafter for whatever she needed in the way of clothes. She would be dependent on his mood and whim!

From the hotel, George guided her up the Avenue and into Tiffany's palatial new store. Its magnificence awed his companion.

"Not here, George! Let's go to some *little* place!"

"What's the matter with Tiff's? Say, my dear, your future husband does things right when he gets married."

At the counter where she held up her finger to be measured, she knew her face was crimson. She could feel the flush; the blood beat in her temples. She

fancied the eyes of every clerk and customer in the store were fixed upon her. She assumed an intent study of the contents of a case as George discussed with the kindly white-haired gentleman who waited on them, how the band of gold should be engraved.

"What do you think to this, Zel',—'From George to Zelda' and the date? On the inside, you know. Like it? Sure, I think so. I'll call for it in the morning. Early, huh? You know we're going to be married first thing. No waiting round for this guy."

She wished—she wished—— George was killing her!

A sudden panic seized her. She walked dizzily to the door, George following, and came again to the bright, sunlit street. George was proposing they should go to The-Little-Church-Around-the-Corner, see the clergyman there, and find out at what hour he would marry them on the morrow.

"Everybody goes to The-Little-Church-Around-the-Corner. Guess there isn't an actor on Broadway who hasn't been married there."

He went on to narrate the story, but Zelda could not listen. She stood on the stone steps of the jewelry store, both hands pressed tightly over her heart.

Oh, she didn't want to be married! . . . She didn't want to be married *at all!* . . . It was forever, after you once did it! . . . "Mrs. Petersen! . . ."

"I guess you'd better go without me, George," she faltered; "you can make the arrangements and telephone me in the morning. I—I've got some shopping to do, a lot of things to get ready. I'll need every minute of this afternoon and evening. . . . No, I can't possibly manage to see you to-night," she continued with more emphasis as his face fell. "There's some sewing I must do, and ever so many things that simply have to be done. I can't spare you even ten minutes."

"But, Zel', . . ." He tried to dissuade her but she was determined now. She must be alone; she must have

time to reflect. Was she crazy to think of getting married? Married to George Selby? To Emil Petersen?

A minute or two later she was walking briskly up the Avenue without a single backward glance. He stood there, she could see him in her mind's eye, hat in hand, in front of Tiffany's steps, gazing after her, hoping for a farewell smile or a wave. She could give him neither. She felt she was running away, running away from George, running away from people. . . . Where? Where to hide? . . . Hadn't she done exactly this same thing before? . . . She couldn't remember, but she must find some place where she would be alone, where nobody could find her.

§ 7

George stood very straight and tall beside her in a tightly fitting cutaway coat that wrinkled across the back from armpit to armpit; he wore a white carnation in his buttonhole, he was freshly shaved and looked very clean. Billy Winship was there. Billy had been a member of the Meserve Company,—a happy-go-lucky, genial soul, to whom comedy parts had usually been entrusted; Zelda had always liked him. George had run into him, he explained, in front of the Lambs' the evening before, and had asked him to "stand up with him" at the wedding. Madame Boulanger was present, too. At the last moment Zelda had asked her to accompany her, and the old Frenchwoman's pleasure had been touching. In the greatest excitement and flurry, she had arrayed herself in her jet bonnet and fur-trimmed pelisse, had ordered a four-wheeler, and driven the bride to the church, where in the garden they had found George and Billy waiting for them.

And at once to Zelda it seemed that everything was being rushed. There was not a moment even to stand and talk a little. She had wanted to ask Billy about the Meserves, about what they were doing this

season, and about everything that had happened to him since they had parted in Philadelphia. But immediately he had gone to apprise the clergyman that they were ready, and then George, with a dignity and gravity that impressed Zelda not a little, offered his arm, and together they walked into the church, and down the aisle, with Madame and Billy in the rear. The church was deserted. No sign of a clergyman; not a sound; empty pews on either side, the odor of stale incense and faded flowers in the air. At the chancel rail, for a moment, they stood silently, awkwardly, and then from a side door, hurriedly came the clergyman, his vestments fluttering behind him, a prayer book in his hand, a finger thrust between its pages.

"Dearly beloved . . ."

"Why, he doesn't know who we are nor even our names!" Zelda thought distressfully. "Why, he's rattling that off like a schoolboy!"

A funny proceeding, this marriage business.

"I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment. . . ."

A fire engine, its bell clanging furiously, went racketing up Fifth Avenue, a block away. Zelda could hear the galloping hoofs coming nearer and nearer, then the sound rapidly lessening in the distance.

"I wonder why there's never a collision," she thought. "They don't stop for anything."

Another bell, a high, shrilling, silvery note. "The Chief's buggy," she mentally commented. George looked so funny in that tight cutaway. No doubt he had borrowed it. Dear George, he *was* nice, and he frowned so seriously as he answered the clergyman.

Behind her, good Madame Boulanger was breathing in a dreadful, audible way, through her nose. It would be just like the emotional old Frenchwoman to begin to cry. *She* wanted to laugh, to laugh right out loud. This whole business was too absurd! Why—Heavens! Evidently they wanted her to kneel down.

". . . ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come, ye may have life everlasting. Amen."

Was *that* all there was to it! Why, it hadn't taken five minutes!

"Let me congratulate you both and let me wish you every happiness, Mrs. Petersen." The solemn face of the clergyman was unexpectedly wreathed in smiles. . . . Mrs. Petersen! Goodness!

George enveloped her in his arms, kissing her lovingly. "My wife!" he whispered, and kissed her hair, disarranging her hat.

"Ma chérie, ma petite chou," Madame Boulanger cried, throwing her arms about her, weeping hysterically.

"Well, Zelda, every happiness, little girl. If George don't make you a good husband, come round to me and take me on as Number Two."

"Now, if you'll all be kind enough to follow me, we'll go to the sacristy, sign our names and the deed will be done," the clergyman announced.

Well, she was married. . . . A married woman. . . . She was a wife now. . . . They could never take that away from her. . . . It was astonishing, when you came to think of it, you could never go back and be a girl again. . . . Always a married woman . . . to the end of your days!

§ 8

George took them to Sherry's for the wedding luncheon, ordered elaborately, demanded a vintage wine, confided to the steward that it was a wedding party, drank Zelda's health, draining the glass to its last drop, drank his own, their joint health, his guests', talked and laughed too loudly for so awesome a place, and told Billy at too great length about the vaudeville sketch. Zelda could see Billy's interest wandering, and that he wanted to talk to her. Madame Boulanger conversed delightedly in her native tongue with the hovering

waiter, referring to the sumptuous furnishings of the restaurant with conspicuous gesturing. Zelda felt neglected, felt uncomfortably conscious of her shabby costume, the bedraggled plume in her year-old hat, but in spite of these things, she was not unhappy. A pleasant excitement animated her. Her troubles were over; the future looked bright and promised adventure, success. She mas a married woman, and George, with all his vanity and his emotional temperament, a big man, handsome, healthy, vigorous, a husband of whom any woman might be proud.

They drove back to Madame Boulanger's after the repast; Zelda must get her suitcase, a bundle or two, and lock her trunk for which she would send later. Billy Winship left them here. They stood on the sidewalk in front of the house, saying good-bye. He kissed Zelda on the cheek, wishing her the best of luck, wrung George's hand, departing, waving his hat.

"See you soon, Billy," George called after him.

"Sure thing. Write me before you go on the road; we'll get together. My turn for a party. . . . You're a darn good-looking couple!"

Madame Boulanger beamed upon them from halfway up the steps, and preceded them to the front door, her voluminous silk skirt elevated in both hands, displaying her white-stockinged ankles.

Zelda turned to her husband with a smile.

"Well?" she said.

"Dearest, are you glad? Are you glad you're my wife?" His look was tender, loving.

She was about to answer when above her at a front window of the third floor, the Nottingham lace curtains moved; a figure that had been standing there was gone.

The words upon her lips died unvoiced.

"Yes," she said briefly, and followed Madame into the house.

CHAPTER IV

§ 1

It was sluicing rain in Winnipeg so they had to take a hack from the station, and Zelda calculated that that broke the last five-dollar bill out of the fifty they had borrowed from Billy Winship.

"Oh, why gloom about it," George demanded irritably. "There'll be sixty Saturday night."

"But there's five per cent to Bennie, and five to the booking office, and we've got to save something to pay Billy back. . . . We're only sure of twelve weeks."

George glowering into the drenched street, said nothing. The wicker basket at Zelda's feet creaked and the cat cried plaintively.

"She's been shut up in there for four hours now," Zelda remarked in a distressed voice. George continued to scowl.

"G-god, what a place! Suppose that bag of mine's getting wet?" He peered through the rain-slashed front window of the hack but the coachman's voluminous rubber coat obscured the view.

Over street-car tracks rattled the vehicle, turned into a side street, and presently stopped before a shabby looking, second-rate hotel. In white letters upon a blue background over the entrance appeared the name, "The Assiniboine House."

"Wonder what kind of a dump this is," George muttered.

"Bennie said it was only a block from the theatre."

"G-god, I don't suppose there's a bell-hop this side of Chicago. Guess we pack our own grips."

Catching up the cat's basket, Zelda made a quick run

for the protecting doorway. The cabman wrestled with the luggage, George cautioning him with a shout to be careful of his new bag. Buster shivered in the slanting rain and blinked unhappily. The lobby was damp, smelled stalely of tobacco smoke, and its linoleum-covered floor was streaked with the marks of wet feet. A double row of cane-seated armchairs, punctuated at intervals with dented brass cuspidors, was arranged in front of the street window, and in these, their hats shoved to the back of their heads, their cigars tilted in their fingers, three men were established, who abruptly lapsed into silence as the new arrivals entered, and gazed at them with unashamed curiosity.

Zelda straightened herself under the bald scrutiny and pretended an interest in a railway map fixed to the wall. She wished George wouldn't dress so flamboyantly. He wore, at the moment, a long, pleated, tan overcoat, belted at the waist, the collar turned up and a derby hat at a slight angle on one side of his head. The hat glistened with rain water and the fawn-colored overcoat was streaked darkly with it. To the clerk, he now addressed himself importantly, but Zelda knew it was not the speckled, pale blue-eyed young man behind the counter whom he was trying to impress but the three listening men.

"We're at the Majestic next week. Want your best accommodations; professional rates. Now I'm from New York, my friend, and I've travelled a good bit over this country, and I don't want any hall closet over the kitchen. . . ."

"Zat the best you can do? Well, guess we'll have to put up with it." To Zelda: "It's only for a week, my dear." To the clerk: "Got a bell-hop or a porter 'round here who can tote a bag?" Annoyance in his tone. He had assumed his "grand manner"; Zelda laid a hand upon his arm.

The clerk picked a key from the board against the wall, came from behind the counter, loaded himself

with the luggage, and preceded them up a narrow carpeted stairway at the rear of the lobby.

The room to which he showed them was small, dark, damp and unaired. A high-backed double bed against the wall, a bureau mounted with a wobbly, rectangular mirror, two straight chairs, a porcelain washstand in one corner with two limp towels on a rack, a small square table in the middle of which stood a china, ribbed match safe. Nothing else; not even a linen scarf on bureau or table. The drawn green window curtain was cracked, and slashed with slits of light. The clerk jerked it up with difficulty. Gray mist, gray rain, gray prospect. Buster sniffed about the room's baseboards and jumped to the centre of the bed's white counterpane.

"Get outer there," George roared at him.

"Don't. . . ." Zelda protested.

The clerk pocketed a dime and departed. Pushing back his hat, George sank on the side of the bed. Zelda opened the basket, and Queenie jumped out, arching her back, fluffing her tail, viewing the surroundings with alert, suspicious eyes.

"Damn," George growled between his teeth.

His wife said nothing. Married but a few weeks, she had already learned that to attempt to pacify him in this mood was only to make herself the target of his ill-temper.

"G-god, what fools, what blithering fools!" he muttered. It was of themselves, she knew, he spoke. She was tempted to offer a comment, but closed her lips upon the words. His wet, bedraggled overcoat still about him, his hands thrust deep into its pockets, his hat at the back of his head, he continued to sit on the bed, grumbling while she went about unpacking her things.

"Damn it, I won't stand it," he said, suddenly getting to his feet. "I won't stay in such a room, cold and bleak and dreadful. I've got to play to-morrow, make

my début in this God-forsaken town! How can I—I do myself justice? *You* can stay in it, if you want to. By G-god, you'd put up with anything! I'm thinking of your comfort, and you won't say a word. You let *me* do all the raving, making a fool of myself. *You're* the one to be considered, aren't you? Is this any kind of a room to put a delicate woman in? I ask you. Www-hy, it isn't good enough for Buster or even the cat! . . . I'm going down-stairs, and I'm going to tell that chuckle-headed, pimply-faced imbecile exactly what I think. We'll find some other hotel; there must be a decent hotel in this place. . . . Tell me, will you, how are we to be expected to give a decent performance to-morrow after a night in a hole like this? . . . And a rehearsal in the morning, too!"

"Oh, George, George . . ." Zelda began, sitting back on her heels before the open suitcase. She went no further; she was tired and nervous herself.

"There you go! Isn't that just like a woman? You'd let any cheap, jerk-water hotel-keeper bulldoze and browbeat you, stick you in a room like this, and not say a word! Well, I'm finer clay, thank God. They don't jam George Selby into any old hole that happens to be available. When I'm on the road, I demand to be treated like a gentleman, for I *am* a gentleman, and I won't stand for a Canuck treating me any other way."

The last was delivered in the open doorway, his voice filling the hall, and to Zelda's shrinking ears, the entire building. Then he went out, jerking the door shut behind him, and she could hear his angry step diminishing down the corridor.

For a moment or two, she remained helplessly where she was, wondering whether or not to proceed with the unpacking. There was no telling what George would do. She went to the bed and lay prone across it, deciding to let matters wait until he returned. The rain flattened itself furiously against the window and, from the force of the impact, a fine spray rose along the

sill on the inside of the room. She felt cold and weary of spirit. Vaguely she wished for a way to get some milk for Queenie. Buster had had puppy biscuit that morning but the cat had not had a morsel of food since Chicago.

A half-hour, an hour dragged past. No George. She dozed where she lay, troubled by the thought she would catch cold unless she covered herself.

Six weeks married; more like six months. Thrilling weeks they had been though, full of excitement, new faces, new places, events. A few days first of happy, laughing, skylarking intimacy, during which, with tears of helpless exhaustion in her eyes, Zelda had again and again implored her husband to stop his buffoonery, or he would make her positively ill. And then one night he had suddenly turned serious, had rumpled his thick shock of black hair until three in the morning, and filled page after page with his sprawling, inky writing as he committed his vaudeville sketch to paper.

"Great stuff, Zelda, old kid," he told her enthusiastically; "they'll eat it up, you see if they won't."

Apparently he was right. Bennie had thought well of it, had counselled him to get the sketch in shape, costume it, procure the animals, and "to give him a ring" when he was ready "to show."

The quest for Buster and Queenie had come next. In Philadelphia, they had procured the dog, a black and white bull terrier, with pert questioning ears, the silkiest of coats, and the kindest, friendliest, most intelligent large brown eyes. Zelda had taken him to her heart the instant her own had fallen upon him.

Buster was adorable. He was neither too big, nor too small; he was just right. From the very first he seemed to comprehend what the whole scheme involving him was about, and his own responsibility in making it a success. Moreover, he understood George, knew when he was in a festive, playful mood, when he was gloomy and depressed, when he was irritable and easily pro-

voked. Zelda was certain the dog exchanged looks with her.

Queenie had been purchased from a cat-dealer on Third Avenue. She was an Angora with long, white, fluffy hair and a great plume of a tail, a selfish, unresponsive creature, forever preening herself with her pink tongue, and annoyingly fastidious about her food.

With the advent of the animals, George and Zelda had been obliged to leave the Imperial; no cats or dogs upstairs. The vacant rooms of an actor friend had been offered, and here for an anxious fortnight "A Cat and Dog Life" had been rehearsed, changed, new "gags" worked into it, while word from Bennie was awaited as to when and where they were to show it.

A music hall, "The Family Theatre," in Harlem!

"No, no, kid, nothing to complain about; we're in luck," George had cried exultantly when she had asked a troubled question. "No Brooklyn, no Newark! You never get anybody to come over to see you when you're that far out of town."

But when her eye had fallen upon "The Family Theatre," with its penny arcade in front, its card, weight and picture machines, its barker in a long coat and plug hat ballyhooing beside the ticket cage where admission to the performance "inside" was ten cents the ticket, her misgivings returned. But there had been evidently nothing amiss about showing a vaudeville "turn" in so tawdry a place. Theirs had seemed to be fairly well received; unexpected laughs in unexpected places perhaps, but genuine laughter none the less, and Zelda had felt that some of the scattering applause was meant for herself just because she had appeared eager and sweet. George had taken all the credit to himself, however. She had not minded that, but she *had* minded dreadfully, his drinking himself into a maudlin, silly, staggering state after it was over, and disgusting her later by love-making.

An anxious twenty-four hours then, when George

in a fit of despondency and contrition, had promised her not to overindulge again, and had shamefacedly confessed to her that his last cent was gone. Zelda remembered for a long time afterwards the black night of worry and fear that followed this confession, but the morning had brought sunshine, the golden sunshine she loved, and word from Bennie that Sullivan & Considine would give them twelve weeks out of Winnipeg to Seattle as part of a road show, with an option of eight more.

And now Winnipeg on a rainy Saturday afternoon in a cheap hotel with less than five dollars in the world, their connections to make, a rehearsal at the theatre at ten the next morning, and George in one of his fault-finding moods when it was impossible to guess what he would do, or in what fresh complications involve them!

The gloom of the waning afternoon filled the room; it was semi-dark. The rain, its fury spent, fell drearily. Water trickled and gurgled in a spout outside the window. It was cold, a damp, clammy cold. Queenie, prowling in the corners, mewed plaintively.

Voices, steps, a commotion in the hall, George's ringing laugh, a quick rap, the door immediately bursting open. Gas from the corridor poured yellow light into the shadowy room. Zelda sat up startled, thrusting her hair into place, brushing with a bent wrist the tear from her cheek.

"Zel'! Girl! Hello! Why all the darkness?" George, buoyant, voluble, noisy. There were others with him, two men outside in the hall.

"Here's Mr. Legg, manager of the hotel, my dear, and he's going to put us into a much finer suite,—bridal suite, hey, Mr. Legg?—in the front of the house. And here is 'Boots,'—you don't mind my calling you 'Boots,' do you, old top?—to carry all our bags and baggage and make us comfortable in our new quarters. My wife, Mr. Legg,—Mrs. Selby."

While he talked George had scratched a match and lit the gas. Zelda saw he had been drinking. She caught up her coat and threw it over her undress, giving the manager the best smile she could command. He was a fat person, jovial, red of face, with side whiskers, who beamed upon her, thumb and fingers tucked into vest pockets jingling coins, while he apologized for the accommodations that had been assigned them.

"Didn't know it was the profession, Mrs. Selby. Hadn't a notion it was such folks as you and your husband. Phipps, my clerk, don't use his noodle. Nothing too good for the profession in my establishment. All the artists from New York stop at *The Assiniboine*."

George was rubbing one hand over another in great good humor.

"Mr. Legg, prince of hosts, Zelda, my love. Treated me royally. Going to treat us both royally. Got the finest bar in Manitoba, finest wines in Canada, finest Médoc in North America. How 'bout that, Mr. Legg? And I met Mr. Promberger, Mr. Zack,—guess it's Zachariah, isn't it, Mr. Legg?—Promberger, and he runs the Majestic, and is another good fellow. Gave me a couple of tickets to the show to-night, and we're going to dine with Mr. Legg 'forehand."

He exhibited the tickets and flicked them in her face. His gaiety was infectious, and Zelda's spirits, which had been at so low an ebb only a moment before, began to rise like effervescent bubbles in a wineglass. Laughing, still but partially dressed, she followed her husband, and Boots with the bags and suitcases to their new room, a larger, more impressive apartment filled with heavy, upholstered furniture, and boasting a zinc tub in an adjoining bath room. And here while Zelda unpacked and arranged her things, bathed and dressed for the unexpected dinner party, George sprawled on a couch, smoking one cigarette after another, and regaled her with a description of his encounter with Mr. Legg in

the hotel bar, how he had impressed the gentleman with his own importance, how he had Legg almost on the point of tears about the room, how the manager had promised to put the best accommodations in the hotel at their disposal, and how they had finally had a drink to celebrate their complete understanding, and how just at that moment Zack Promberger had wandered in, Legg had presented George, and they had had another round,—a couple of rounds,—and Promberger had thawed out a bit and handed out two tickets for that evening's entertainment at the Majestic.

"Promberger's all right, I guess. Bit stuck on himself, I should imagine, but a good sort. He's a Jew, of course, and I'm 'fraid you'll think him kind of fat and greasy. Well, I guess he is, but you want to jolly him along. Guess he thinks himself quite a hand with the ladies, from what he confided to me. . . . Say, you know, he remembers me in that show 'Hearts Adrift' when we played it in Chicago. . . ." George digressed into a rambling reminiscence to which Zelda only casually listened. She was wondering how much of their meager funds he had tossed across the bar, and presently found the courage to ask. George burst into an explosive laugh and slapped his knee.

"My God, that you should ask me that!" He roared delightedly, rocking to and fro, holding his head in his hands. "Oh, that's a good one, oh, that's a good one. Look here, look here." From his pocket he pulled out a handful of bills and small change. "I got old Legg to O. K. a chit for five simoleons at the bar, and then we all got shaking razzle-dazzle at a quarter a flop, and I cleaned up about ten more. How's that for a smart hubby?" He exploded again joyously.

"You didn't, George,—really?" She was pleased in spite of herself. "But what would you have done, if you'd lost?"

His face instantly went dark, the smile swept from

him, while the look he gave her was one of frank annoyance.

"Owed it, I guess, or picked Legg's pocket or robbed the till. What the devil *could* I have done?" He rose with a petulant heave, his sunny mood gone, shrugged elaborately, and began tugging at his clothes, preparing to dress.

§ 2

There were four others besides themselves at Mr. Legg's dinner, which was served in a private room separated from the main hotel dining-room by flimsy, folding doors. Not until the meal was half over, did Zelda realize that the other guests were vaudeville entertainers like themselves, and were to be in the same road show with them all the way to Seattle.

She turned an eye of new interest upon them. The woman opposite, who, up until the moment of discovery, Zelda had thought the oddest and the most extraordinary person she had ever had as a table companion, was large, homely, with close-set eyes and a long nose. She had enormous red hands and a huge head with short curly hair, and not more than half-a-dozen words passed her lips during the evening, and these she pronounced with a strong Teutonic accent. Everybody, even George, called her "Mabel," sometimes Madam Mabel, or Miss Mabel, but more often just plain "Mabel." Zelda wondered what sort of entertainment this singularly endowed creature offered and was frankly puzzled until enlightened by her host who explained in a whisper behind a fat palm.

" 'Mabel, the Athletic Girl,' rings, trapeze, that sort of thing. Been Winnipeg before; been vaudeville for years."

Besides this individual there were Mr. and Mrs. Hayden, nice, vulgar people. The woman was the pink-and-white doll type, talked meaninglessly most of the

time, and thought George the funniest man she'd ever met in her life. A dancing team, Zelda gathered from the talk; a third member of their combination was to join them in the morning. "Toots" Bender of "Hayden, Bender and Hayden," would take the midnight out of Chicago after his show closed in that city. The remaining guest seemed at first more interesting. "Just 'Van' please," he asked Zelda to call him; "real name's Van Zandt, Eustace Van Zandt, but vaudeville bills me as 'Van Sands—the Man with the Mysterious Hands.' I'm a prestidigitator, do tricks with cards, travelled with the Great Herman for years, know all his secrets. Queer game, isn't it? . . . You know you're awful pretty, Miss Marsh."

Zelda was glad when the meal came to an end and it was time to go to the theatre. It was not easy to persuade George to leave; he had reached a discursive, garrulous stage, wanting to find a piano and sing some of his songs to Mrs. Hayden. While Zelda went upstairs with milk for Queenie and a plate of scraps for the dog, he made the most of the opportunity and downed several ponies of Mr. Legg's double proof brandy, and on the way to the theatre, grew thick of speech, unsteady of step, and during the performance slept soundly and had to be nudged when he snored.

Just inside the entrance to the theatre was billboarded the announcement of the "Tip-top" vaudeville attraction which would occupy the Majestic's stage for the ensuing week. There were photographs of Zelda and George with Buster and Queenie in their arms,—"Selby and Marsh in the side-splitting comedy, 'A Cat and Dog Life.'" There was a picture of "Mabel, the Athletic Girl," in tights and a gold-fringed velvet bodice, lifting a hundred-pound dumb-bell, and a group of the two Haydens with "Toots" Bender, a banjo in his hands, sitting between them, and "Van Sands, the Man with the Mysterious Hands" holding a royal flush of cards. Other photographs were of members of the road

show whom Zelda as yet had not met: Maud de Reszke, "the great contralto, direct from European triumphs," and Shamus O'Mara and Company in the one-act operetta, "Kitty Macree."

"He's the head-liner," George told her when, roused from slumber at the intermission, he accompanied Zelda to the foyer for a cigarette and a breath of air. "You've heard of O'Mara, haven't you, kid? He's an old timer; got one of those rangey Irish tenor voices and sings sentimental ditties. This act of his, guess he's played it ten years. They won't book him any more on the big circuits. He's got four people with him, but I don't believe they pay his whole aggregation more than two fifty.

"Well, that's the outfit," he continued: "it's a bum bunch, if you ask me, but you can't pick and choose your team mates in this business. We'll get to know 'em all a lot better 'fore we get to Seattle. . . . Gee, my mouth's sour! Wonder if I could get a glass of beer across the street. It isn't raining so hard now. You stay here, Zel', and I'll be right back."

§ 3

There was a rehearsal at the theatre at ten o'clock the next morning. It had turned sharply cold during the night, and between scudding patches of black clouds, there were occasional bursts of sunshine. The theatre was icy. Zelda, in costume and make-up, sitting on a stack of scenery piled against the brick wall back stage, hugged Buster in her lap for warmth. She did not care about the powder on her bare arms. George had awakened with a "head"; his indisposition on the morning following an evening of drinking always grew worse toward eleven o'clock, and it was now not far from that hour. He sat near Zelda, his forehead supported between thumb and finger, so as not to disturb his make-up, and from time to time, he emitted a low: "Oh—

oh—oh—" rocking gently to and fro. Queenie in her straw basket struggled for liberty and clawed at the wire bars of its small door.

An atmosphere of confusion and disorder prevailed. Mr. Zack Promberger out front, was shouting angry directions to stage hands concealed in the flies; a drop had stuck and refused to come down; in the orchestra pit a pianist was softly trying over the accompaniments of the contralto's songs, and De Reszke bent over him and indicated the tempo with elaborate gestures. The inarticulate Athletic Girl had suddenly become voluble and in her own tongue was furiously upbraiding a bewildered mechanic for improperly erecting the apparatus supporting her trapeze and rings; and Shamus O'Mara, stalking up and down, clad incongruously in green knee breeches, a tail coat and an Irish corbeen, adorned with a large steel buckle, complained to anyone who would listen to him, that in his thirty-three years' experience on the stage, he had never been asked to share the same dressing room with his entire company. "The proprieties, the proprieties," he kept repeating, "there are ladies, you know. . . ." Mr. and Mrs. Hayden were in fine agitation: "Toots" Bender had failed to arrive on the midnight from Chicago!

It was noon before the rehearsal got under way, and a dreadful affair it proved, for all concerned. Promberger barked criticisms and one interruption followed another. Steam began to filter into the coils of pipe that ranged the side aisles of the building, and these fitfully clanked and reverberated with metallic detonations. When it came to George's and Zelda's turn, the former could do no more than walk through his part; he had none of his usual cheery good humor nor lightness of step and voice; even Buster acted lumpishly and Zelda feared the dog was sick. The act dragged, George failed to pick up his cues, it was a dismal, dreadful failure. The utter silence with which it was received by the few people in the house filled Zelda with despair.

There was not sufficient time to run through the Irish number. The matinée began at two-fifteen, and Mabel's trapeze and rings had first to be erected. It commenced to rain again, a sharp, slanting drizzle, and George refused to take off his make-up and costume, and return to the hotel for the brief rest and cup of tea that Zelda urged.

In spite of the dismal impression the morning had left behind it, in spite of hit-and-miss preparations, in spite of her own weariness and hunger, a certain excitement began to stir her blood. Cold inside, wet outside it might be, a dreary, barnlike theatre, and a second-rate, possibly third-rate vaudeville program, but it was an opening performance. Even during the hurry of the blundering stage crew running back and forth on last minute preparations, she felt a certain unwonted animation. She could hear the first of the audience arriving, their voices echoing in the vacant auditorium, an occasional bang of a seat falling into place, a slowly increasing bustle and murmur.

§ 4

The performance went off not much better than the rehearsal. The house was less than half full; rows of empty seats; a faint echoing in the building; catcalls now and then from the gallery; a general whistling from various parts of the house when Buster made his appearance. The dog quite won the hearts of the audience by standing with alert ears before the footlights and jerking his small head questioningly from side to side at each shrill call, barking defiance when confusion and bewilderment overcame him. Zelda was quick enough to adapt herself to this unexpected development and saved the act. There was some genuine applause following their turn, and over the little six o'clock supper of devilled ham, crackers and beer, purchased at a nearby restaurant and carried to their hotel room, George quite

satisfied his wife's heart by his praise, his regret for his intemperance the night before, and his vehement assurances it should never happen again.

"You know, kid," he suggested thoughtfully after their complete reconciliation, "you know, I think that whistling at Buster from out front is a good idea. We could always plant one of the ushers to start it, the house would pick it up instantly, and the dog's smart enough to learn it's part of the act."

"Well, he's an old darling," Zelda said, fondling the animal, who looked up into her face, his brown eyes alight with intelligent understanding, and there was a loving fierceness in the clasp with which she suddenly hugged him to her.

§ 5

An exhausting week of changes, adjustments, exactions. It was hard work, unsparing work. Three performances a day, one in the afternoon, two at night. George and Zelda came on at three-thirty, nine-fifteen, and ten-thirty. They were out of the theatre usually by eleven, and half an hour later would be in bed. The animals proved an unexpected care. Zelda had to get up at six every morning to air and feed them. She only partially dressed then and was back beside her husband by seven. She woke George at noon, they made leisurely toilets and went forth with Buster in search of breakfast-lunch, bringing back a pint bottle of milk for Queenie when they returned. By three they had to be at the theatre.

"Twelve weeks of this," Zelda said with a deep weary sigh one night when, aching from what had been a particularly hard day, she and George were preparing for bed.

"Unless we get the boot," her husband suggested lightly.

"Oh, no; I want to go through with it, now. No

matter how hard. We've *got* to, George; other people stand it; there's no reason why we shouldn't."

"Well, sixty a week sounds pretty good, but that's no salary. Wait till we do big time and draw down two fifty or three hundred a week. I hope we get to Frisco; I want some of those Orpheum people to see our act. They're our fish. Forty weeks at three hundred a week! That's money."

"We must save on what we're getting at present, George; twenty-five *at least*. We shouldn't spend a cent over twelve for our room and not more than two a day for food. . . . George, you must help me. That's only three hundred dollars by the time we get to Seattle, and we owe fifty to Billy. George, you *will* help me, won't you?"

"Darling, darling, 'course I will. You're a wonder, Zel'. G-god, I don't know what I'd've done if I hadn't met you. You bring out the best in me, Zel'; you appeal to my better nature, the—the spiritual side of me. We're all constituted that way: two sides to every man, the animal side and the spiritual side, the beast and the spirit. The two are always struggling in me for mastery. Oh, Zel', if you knew the terrific battles that sometimes go on in here! They're just terrific. Giants grappling with one another. Sometimes this body of mine is literally racked and torn from the fearful conflict. One or the other always conquers, and until I met you, it was usually the beast. But now the better side of me is day by day getting stronger and stronger, and maybe,—who knows?—maybe it means the final routing of the beast, the triumph of good over evil."

He was in bed as he spoke, one elbow crooked beneath his head, and it was the white ceiling above him, rather than his wife, that he addressed. She turned out the gas, opened the window a few inches, stooped to pat Buster in the darkness, and crawled in beside her husband. He drew her to him, an arm about her, and she rested her head upon his shoulder. She liked the hard,

clean smoothness of George's flesh. There was a healthy smell, a good, honest smell about him.

" . . . I read a book once about a doctor who used to experiment on himself with a drug, and the drug turned him into a fiend, and the man's better nature was always struggling with the fiend for possession of the man's soul. That's just my case. I think I was born with something evil in me, something downright wicked. I have a natural craving for what's bad. I know it's bad when I think about it in my right mind, and perhaps I know its bad when the beast has the upper hand in me, but I *want* to be wicked then; I don't want to be good. Sometimes I think my soul is typical of the whole world, the eternal struggle between Goodness and Evil. But you've brought Goodness to me, Zel', Goodness and Light, and you've showed me the way. It's amazing how the great truths of life come home to you after you've had experience in the world. Now 'It pays to be good.' Isn't that true, Zel'? Isn't that extraordinary? . . . Say what's the matter? . . . You asleep? Oh, for G-god's sake!"

§ 6

They left Winnipeg late the following Saturday night in a tourist sleeper. The week just ended had not been a success in any sense of the word. At no time had the theatre been more than half full and at matinées there had been hardly more than a handful in the auditorium. At some performances there had scarcely been a laugh, and the thinnest, most half-hearted of hand clapping. George had said it was the weather; Promberger claimed it was the show. There was small doubt in anybody's mind what sort of a report the house manager would send on to Seattle.

"I don't know what in the world we're going to do with Buster," Zelda said to George when they were trying to make room for themselves, their menagerie, their bags and suitcases in the cramped quarters of the

sleeping car. Their section had been made up and Zelda stood in front of the parted green rep curtains frankly puzzled. "Buster can't stay in here. I can manage Queenie, but the dog——"

"I'll get the porter to tie him in the men's washroom until our train picks us up, and then take him forward to the baggage car. We ought to have checked some of this stuff. . . . What time do we get to Minneapolis? . . . Oh, *Lord!*"

The tourist sleeper, they were informed, was to accompany them all the way to Seattle. After Minneapolis, there would be no more one-week stands until they got to Spokane where they were scheduled to appear Christmas week. There were thirteen in the troupe and Maud de Reszke refused positively to travel as one of such a number until it was pointed out to her that Burns, the porter, made the fourteenth. . . . Burns, black, ugly, slouching, white of rolling eye and glistening teeth, how Zelda learned to love his lumpy physiognomy during the three months that followed. She wondered then and many a time later, what she would have done and how endured the awful, racketing nights she spent in the cramped quarters of her travelling home without the unfailing resourcefulness and devotion of this obliging servant.

She was in her berth presently, stretched out comfortably between the coarse sheets, Queenie asleep, curled up in a ball beside her. An unexpected peace and relaxation came to her. She felt tired in soul and body, and oh, so glad to lie thus quietly and rest, rest without moving, without sleeping—for hours and hours! The fringed window curtain beside her was raised a few inches, and by adjusting a second pillow beneath her head, she could see the glare of the station lights glistening along parallel lines of rails; there was a ding-donging of bells now distant, now near, the tap-tapping of iron hammers on iron wheels, and now and then the measured hiss-hiss of escaping steam as a switch engine,

panting hoarsely, lumbered past. Voices reached her, thin, weirdly muffled. Van Sands arrived, and she could hear him talking with George where he was standing, smoking a cigarette beside the car steps. Buster was loose, running up and down busily investigating. She hoped George would keep a watchful eye on him. Those switch engines or a car shunted along the tracks, rolling silently upon its way . . . !

The Haydens came next. She could distinguish Mildred's shrill tones and it was apparent they had been drinking. Bender, the banjo player, who had materialized the day following the Sunday opening, and whom Zelda thought too "fresh," was now unmistakably intoxicated. The three of them came noisily into the silent, shrouded car, laughing boisterously. One by one the rest of the troupe arrived; the "Athletic Girl" asking in her thick guttural German voice the hour they would reach Minneapolis, Shamus O'Mara whistling to Buster to come and be patted, finally De Reszke excited, voluble, in a fine temper, appealing to high heaven to witness that never before on three continents where she had sung, had she been asked to travel in such degrading style. "A drawing-room, a compartment surely, there's no privacy, no place where one can be alone. I must have rest, I must have sleep—my voice—I cannot sing —I don't know what they are going to do—my contract——" She carried her complaints up and down the aisle, pouring them into the ears of the patient Burns who agreed with affable, sympathetic "Yes ma'ams." A voice protested:

"Oh, shut up, Maud, and go to bed." Laughter from the Haydens; even Zelda smiled in the dark. A glorious drowsiness was settling upon her; voices, noises began to mingle delightfully. George would be in presently. He would be above her in the upper berth, but she'd be asleep by that time; nothing would disturb her. At two the sleeper would be jarred a bit, she might perhaps feel the first rumbling of the wheels and the im-

pact of collision when the car was coupled up, and then—oh, then—at seven the next morning, Minneapolis, stumbling out into the cold raw morning, unwashed, hungry, uncertain of hotels! . . . She fell gratefully asleep.

Towards five o'clock she suddenly awoke, her senses keenly alert. The train was racketing along, *tuddy-dum, tuddy-dum, tuddy-dum*. At a crossing the engine whistled a long note of wailing warning. Peering through the window she could see a pale luminousness on the horizon; black shapes, houses, fences, telegraph poles, hurtled past. The heavy brown blanket under her fingers was gritty with cinders. Queenie started at her touch, then curled herself to sleep again. What had disturbed Zelda? She lay, straining her ears. Was George in the upper berth? The car was silent except for the rumble of the wheels and the stertorous breathing of a heavy sleeper across the aisle. Or was that all? . . . . A click and a subdued voice. "George!" she called breathlessly. Her voice went no further than the four walls that hemmed her in. He could not hear her. She listened again. Something was stirring in the car. A smothered laugh, then distinctly: "Thirty days," and George's unmistakable "Damn. You got the luck of a fat Spanish priest," a pet phrase of his. She parted the curtains and looked out. At one end of the car there was light, and in a section not made up, she could see the white shirt sleeves of two men. Hayden faced her; the others were next the window, screened from view. Cards and chips on the table told the story . . . Poker! . . . George playing cards until five in the morning! . . . Losing his entire week's salary no doubt! . . . And three performances ahead of him!

Zelda sank back upon the hard pillow, slowly pressed her lips together, harder and harder, while a deep frown settled between her eyes.

CHAPTER V

§ 1

It was the first wedge in the disintegration of her faith in George. The episode passed, was forgotten, or if not wholly that, was put behind her and shut away. His contrition came the next day after they arrived in Minneapolis, and she could ask for nothing more complete. He cried big, watery tears, waved his arms, clutched his hair, buried his face in her lap, and actually sobbed, dramatically acting his repentance. He had lost all his money, and had to borrow a five-dollar bill to carry him through the week. Zelda, listening to him unmoved, wondered whether he would have made a like parade of grief if he had won instead. But she forgave him. There were promises, assurances, kisses and passionate apostrophes to God that she was the finest woman, the finest wife in the whole, wide world. Big, clumsy, kneeling at her feet, wringing his handkerchief, assuring her of future straight-going, suddenly she seemed to see him as he really was,—unreliable, profligate, selfish, vain of his looks and poses. This was the man she had taken for her husband, the man with whom her fate and fortunes were forever to be linked! Why had she done it? Why had she been so blind? Why—why—why—why—why? . . . There was never any ending to the whys.

Not that she no longer loved George. She still loved him, or perhaps, she decided, her feeling was better described as a fondness for him. That was it,—fond of him. It had never been more than that. She knew it now, and her regard for him had undergone no change. She had been fond of him the previous summer in

New York, she had been fond of him when she married him, and she was fond of him still. Fond of him as a very much older sister might be of a little boy. He was a naughty boy, a wilful, selfish little boy; he frequently annoyed and humiliated her, although so often she felt dreadfully sorry for him. But *love?* Not that. It never *had been* that. Nearer pity than love. . . . And again the reflection, this was her fate, this was the man among men to whom she had entrusted herself as long as they both should live! . . . Oh, where was Michael? Grinning, funny-faced, happy-go-lucky Michael?

For a few days and nights she meditated upon her marriage, her condition of life, and a good deal upon herself, and came to the conclusion it was meditation to small purpose. After a time she grew familiar with these reflections, and ceased to harbor them. One long difficult day followed another: to bed, to the theatre, to bed again; one snatched a mouthful of breakfast-lunch, gobbled a fifty-cent table d'hôte dinner, and on these two meals a day one subsisted, and was grateful it was no fewer. One stepped out of the sequin-spangled costume, fluffy of skirt and low cut in the back, which had seemed so gorgeous when first tried on, hurriedly seated one's self before the tiny, sun-spotted mirror that was one's own, shoved hair off forehead, held it there with a round comb, smeared on cold cream, rubbing it vigorously over shut eyes, face and neck, wiped it energetically away, thinking longingly of but one thing: the waiting, flat bed where one could stretch out peacefully, comfortably, and *sleep*. It made no difference now whether it was a bed in a cheap hotel or the familiar berth in the tourist car.

Zelda ceased to be interested in knowing where they were going or how long they were to remain in a place. More than once she had the odd experience of having to ask the name of the town in which they were. Butte, Miles City, Cheyenne, she lost track of them. They all smelled the same, looked the same, were the same:

the red brick bank building on the corner of Market and Main Streets, the High School, the new depot, the City Hall, the flimsy-looking garish variety theatre with torn and bleeding posters still on display of big-hipped, simpering chorus girls in pink tights advertising the allurements of some tawdry burlesque show now departed. There were but four things,—and only four,—she really wanted to know: What was the best second-class hotel in town? What were the rates? Was it European or American plan? How far from the theatre?

Buster and Queenie were her constant, intimate companions. She had to get up every morning to feed them, take them out for an airing, and once a week bathe both of them. Queenie's white fur caught every flying flake of soot that came her way, and Zelda would worry about it until she was spotless again. The cat hated these ablutions, and scratched and struggled during them, but Buster, while not enjoying the actual process of being soaped and sponged, knew that a glorious tumble and romp with his mistress invariably followed the unpleasant business, and he submitted with patient boredom. The dog's devotion to her often made Zelda's heart tighten with pain and brought to her eyes the smart of tears. He knew her every mood, was sleepy and tired when she was sleepy and tired, was ready to play when she was so inclined, and going docilely back to the hotel after his fifteen-minute airing in the morning, would lie quietly beside her bed when she had returned to it for further sleep and rest, and remain there without a sound or a movement for four or five hours. Once when she and George had overslept, the animal woke her by jumping on the bed, and nuzzling her with his cold nose until she sat up startled and alarmed. George scoffed at the idea that the dog could tell the time, but Zelda was not so sure. They reached the theatre just in time to scramble into their costumes and go on.

Coming in late one night, heavy with beer, George

stumbled over Buster in the dark and kicked him with a savage "damn." Instantly Zelda sprang from the bed, and faced her husband, quivering with fury.

"Don't—you—dare—kick—that—dog," she said menacingly through shut teeth.

George blustered, blaming the animal for being in the way.

"Don't—you—dare—kick—that—dog."

He looked at her, puzzled by her passionate tone, the light from the hallway streaming upon her white, set face, disheveled hair, and long, white night dress.

"Aw—go on—" he began uneasily, attempting to pass her to the gas jet, but Zelda caught him fiercely by the forearm and stopped him.

"Do you hear what I say?"

The passion in her breast frightened her. One committed murder in such rages as this.

"Sure, sure, I hear you. What's eating you, Zel'? I just stumbled over the dog, that's all; I couldn't see him in the dark——"

"You kick that dog or ever lift a finger to him, and I'll walk out on you and never see you again!" Her tone was even, deadly, and the quick concern with which George stared at her, satisfied her he understood.

Buster was the only element in her life that made it endurable, she sometimes thought. George, now and then, was the old delightful companion she had known the previous summer. He could be witty, nonsensical, amusing, and he could make her laugh until the tears stood in her eyes. That was the George she loved, the George she had thought she was marrying. He stirred her too, when he was tender and loving, humble and unaffected, when he praised her and told her she was the only influence for good that had ever entered his life. Other people were the disturbing, disrupting element that came between them, took him from her, often to change him into a being for whom she had only contempt and dislike. An audience, it need be only the girl

at a hotel newsstand, or a loitering boy outside of the stage entrance, could metamorphose him in the twinkling of an eye, and he would humiliate and hurt her as if she were no more to him than a servant who blackened his boots. When he was in the company of the Haydens or Bender or Van or indeed of any member of the road show, he was lost to her completely. Then anything for a laugh, any buffoonery to attract attention, any food, drink, or game that was proposed. Night after night she left him in their company, talking, laughing, singing, and went upstairs to Buster and Queenie and their cheerless hotel room. Often he did not notice when she went. An hour later, sometimes two, sometimes three, she would be sufficiently aroused to hear him blundering about the room, throwing off his clothes, scratching matches to smoke a cigarette while he undressed, and presently he would heave himself into bed beside her.

"Hey, Zel'! Asleep, kid?" He would feel for her in the dark and perhaps kiss her shoulder or her arm through her sheer nightdress. Feigning deep slumber, she would make no response. He would smell of tobacco and his breath would be hot from drink.

A grunting, sniffing then, a clumsy humping and settling of his big body, perhaps a disgusted: "G-god!" and in a moment or two his guttural, steady snuffling, that meant he was asleep.

§ 2

A matter of constant worry and increasing resentment with Zelda was George's extravagance. He had no thought of saving. Money trickled through his fingers like water. When he had it, he was a lord, and dealt it out with a lordly air; when he was without, he was gloomy, despondent, irritable. They never quitted one town and arrived in the next, with more than a handful of silver. When Zelda's watchful eye was not

upon him, he gambled,—cards, dice, matching coins; she knew he did it although she had his promise; continually he deceived her. Sometimes he was in funds, more often down to his last dollar. He had no realization of how his money went. At night, before going to bed, he would dump from his trousers pocket on to the bureau a greenback or two, perhaps a gold piece, and some loose silver. When she got up early to go out with Buster and the cat, Zelda would see the money there in a little pile. That same evening, it would be gone.

"Gee, Zel', haven't you got half-a-dollar tucked away some place?"

"George, do you mean to tell me you've spent all that money you had this morning? Have you been gambling again?"

"No, honest to God, Zel', I haven't touched a card since we left Miles City."

"Where did it go to then?"

"Damned if I know. I spent sixty, or maybe it was seventy-five for breakfast, and there was that bottle of milk for Queenie, and I remember I got a shine and a newspaper. . . ."

He would offer no more satisfactory explanation. She had a better idea of where the money went than he had. In an effort to save, she might decide on only eggs and toast for breakfast, rather than duplicate George's order for steak and potatoes; her share of the check would be less than a quarter, but again and again she would see him wave away as a tip to the waitress that much, perhaps more. There was no incentive for her to economize. She realized how important it was for them to save; they should put away at least half their salary every week, but by Christmas, when they reached Spokane, George was in debt to almost every member of their company.

"Oh, my God, Zel', don't worry about that. People in the profesh are eternally borrowing from each other. Guess I owe a couple of hundred folk in this business

something or other. When I have it, they can tap me, and they know it. I never refused an actor a loan in my life; why, I'd hand 'em out the last cent I had in the world if they needed it. Sooner or later they pay you back. Why, when I was down in Atlantic City, 'bout the last week of 'The Hottentot Princess' I had three fellows pay up what they owed me. There was a guy from Texas that sent me a money order for two hundred simoleons he'd been owing me for a couple of years. That's how I happened to be so flush when I hit New York. . . . Say, tell me, Zel', didn't you think I was rolling in wealth? Hadn't the big roll something to do with your saying 'Yes'?"

He was joking, of course, trying to tease her, but she asked herself later how she should have answered if obliged to speak the truth.

Week after week that occasional heap of loose change on the bureau top which melted away so quickly and easily before nightfall troubled Zelda. She remembered the shining gold twenties Boylston used to leave for her. . . .What a child, what an ignorant innocent she had been in those days! Little round discs of gold with which to buy baubles and pretties! She had learned the value of money since then,—ah God! at how dear a price!

But George was of a different calibre from the Doctor. The carelessly deposited pile of money on the bureau top was not for her. He gave her what she asked for whenever she wanted it, providing he had it. He was as generous with her as with anybody else. She found herself often looking covetously at that little heap of quarters, dimes and folded greenbacks. By night it would be flung to the four winds. She began by salvaging a quarter, then a half, and one day when there was quite a jumble of silver and bills, a whole dollar. "Hooking," she styled her petty pilfering. One morning she "hooked" two-bits, the day after only a dime, at the next chance she must "hook" something

bigger. At the end of the month she counted up how much she had collected in this way, and was surprised and a little frightened to find out she had over thirty dollars.

"I'll give every cent of it back to him," she argued with her conscience; "every cent, whenever he needs it. He'll be mighty surprised some day when he's dead broke, to have me hand him over what I've saved. By the time we get to Seattle, I ought to have fifty. . . . Anyhow, I'm half the team, and fifty per cent of everything we take in rightly belongs to me. . . ."

Nevertheless, she was not wholly satisfied with herself. The very fact that she called taking the money "hooking" disturbed her; she wished she had never heard the word, or at least never applied it in this connection.

"But in one evening," she would break off her reflections to say to a blank wall, "he will spend every cent I've struggled so hard to save, and give a waiter a five-dollar bill for fetching him a glass of water!"

§ 3

On Saturdays and Sundays in Spokane and Seattle, there were five shows a day with fifty cents allowed each performer for supper money. "Continuous vaudeville." Zelda had never heard the phrase before. Usually on these days, she and most of the others in the troupe did not take off their costumes or remove their make-ups from the time they put them on for their first appearance until they took them off after their last; there was less than an hour and a half between appearances. Van Sands, George, Billy Hayden and "Toots" Bender, all of whom could effect an easy change into street attire, would sally forth and bring back to the theatre tin pails of hot coffee, bottles of beer, bundles of tissue-wrapped sandwiches, doughnuts and bakery pies. Crowded together in one of the larger dressing rooms, hot and

thick with cigarette smoke, they shared these "feeds" and grumbled over the hours and the hard work. It was tiresome and boring, of course, but Zelda found a certain amount of fun and excitement about these long days and these feasts they had together, with the men squatting on the dirty floor, drinking beer out of bottles tilted to their mouths, munching sandwiches, the girls perched on the make-up shelf or in what available chairs there were, all of them smoking, gossiping, swapping smutty stories, laughing, "joshing," waiting their turn. Sordid, rowdy, common, it might be, but it was good fun and good fellowship.

One night when it came to George's and Zelda's time to go on, he was nowhere to be found. It was the third show, the seven thirty-five one; Zelda, off stage, waited for him to appear in the wings at the opposite side. She was not sure whether he was in the theatre or not. One of the stage hands was playing with Queenie, poking his finger through the bars of the wicker basket, but there was no sign of George. The orchestra played its introductory music, reached his cue, repeated, but still no George. Blindly, her heart thundering, Zelda went on alone, vamping George's lines, interjecting her own, trying to give the plot of their sketch single-handed. She saw disaster looming ahead, and abandoned the attempt. Buster and her own quick wits saved the situation. At her call, he came bounding to her from the wings, and making him sit down on his hind legs and listen, she half crouched in front of him, and with a lifted, wagging finger, told him, and the audience as well exactly what had happened. She had no idea that her monologue would be amusing; she made it up as she went along solely to fill in time until she could decently make an exit, but in the midst of her story, it suddenly came to her that Buster understood every word she was saying. Perhaps her words were not intelligible to him, but the strong bond of sympathy that existed between the dog and his mistress conveyed the meaning. There

was little doubt that he grasped what she said, and his timely appreciative barks saved the act. When Zelda ran off with Buster at her heels, a warm burst of hand-clapping followed her.

Haas, the house manager, was watching from the wings.

"That was a nice bit, Miss Marsh. Think they liked it better than your regular turn. I gotta hand it to you. . . . What happened to him?"

What, indeed, had happened to him? Zelda, her heart torn between anxiety and resentment, wanted to find out. It had been an ordeal to carry off their turn alone, and she was a little shaky and her hands trembled. In their dressing room, Rus Hayden helping him, she found George struggling into his clothes. He had just forgotten the time, that was all; he and Rus had stopped to have a drink and, by Jiminy, when he glanced up at the clock over the bar, he was flabbergasted to see that it was quarter to eight.

"Gee, did they 'boo' you, Zel'? Was it pretty awful? Gee, I never did anything like that before in my life,—throw down an audience! Whew, that's the limit! . . . Did Moe Haas raise a stink? Guess that means they won't renew."

§ 4

But they did "renew," which meant that George and Zelda signed up for eight additional weeks, to play Vancouver, Victoria, Tacoma, Portland, Sacramento, and so down the coast to Frisco.

Frisco! Zelda's heart plunged at the thought of being in her dear, beloved "City of the Hills" again. Since she had left it eighteen months before, she had come to think of her old home town as that,—"dear, beloved." In her mind's eye she saw herself crossing the Bay, standing out "in front" on an S. P. boat, the sharp west wind from the Heads tugging at skirts and hat, Goat Island, the new Ferry Building,—built since she went

away,—wharves and docks, masts and stacks, the gimcrack, jerry-built houses rising in a tumble of roofs, peaked, mansard, gabled, with now and then a tapering spire, yellow, brown, red, white, a Jacob's coat, lines of cable cars like insects crawling up and down the precipitous, irregular hills. Her breath quickened. Ah, home —home! Her uncle and aunt lived there. Boylston. Yes, she would be glad to see even the doctor again, if only to say 'Hello' and to find out how he was getting along, and maybe,—her heart stood still,—maybe Michael! He might have returned by this time. Michael. *Michael!* Ah, dear God, not again—not again. . . .

The prospect of San Francisco so soon lent a new interest to the days. She had become inured to the hardships of the life she led. She no longer worried about whether their little sketch "went over" well or not; it played smoothly now, and both she and George had learned just how and where to "point" their lines, and where to expect a laugh. You never could tell from vaudeville audiences whether they liked you or not; they were all about the same, not critical, wanting to be amused, wanting to laugh if given half a chance. The house managers were a different gentry, far more difficult to please. There was no accounting for the way these individuals reacted. Some of them liked "A Cat and Dog Life"; others didn't. George's faith in the sketch was unabated; he believed in it, believed it would "go" on a bigger circuit. He talked confidently of tying up with the Orpheum when he reached Frisco and their contract with S. & C. was ended. It would mean three times their present salary, he predicted, forty weeks' employment, and only one performance a day except matinées on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday.

"I'm out for 'big time,' " he said over and over; "no more of this cheap three- and four- and five-a-day for George Selby. I'm done with it forever. Either we get 'big time' or I go back to the legit."

About George too, Zelda no longer worried so much. He was improvident, excitable, bombastic, in wild spirits one day, in the depths of depression the next, but in a peculiar way, entirely characteristic of him, he loved her, and sooner or later, after he had drunk or gambled too much, been bumptious or made a fool of himself, she could count on his coming humbly to her, begging forgiveness and promising with all the sincerity of which at the moment he was capable, to mend his ways.

In Seattle he caught a heavy cold; it rained the whole time they were there, and for the three weeks in which a tight congestion bound his chest, late hours, boon companions, cards, drink, and midnight suppers held no lure for him. He revelled in his wife's care of him, loved her babying and her solicitude.

"Ah, Zelda kid, that feels good, that feels great. Gee, you certainly know how to take care of a fellow when he's down. . . . G-god, I'll get through with this somehow; I'll stick it out, Zel', until we get to Frisco, and then maybe you and I will take a good long rest. I belong in a sanitarium, I know that. Rest, good food, quiet, no more worry, that's what I need. . . . D'you suppose I got T. B., Zel'?"

"Oh, no, George dear. Just a heavy chest cold, that's all."

"Suppose that Seattle fellow knew what he was talking about?"

"I think so. Haas recommended him."

"Don't you think we'd better have another fellow look at me here? Portland's a pretty big place, you know. Ought to have pretty good medicos here."

"I really don't think it is necessary, George. It would mean another fiver, you know."

"Well, *God!* You aren't thinking about money when my health's at stake, are you? Was there ever such a wife! I ask you."

"No, no; it isn't the money, and you know it. You look so much better, and you *are* so much better."

"Suppose I died, Zel'. What in the name of God would become of you? Whenever I think of that a cold sweat breaks out on me. Last night, I lay awake hour after hour thinking about it, and I looked at you sleeping so soundly and so peacefully beside me, and I tell you what, Zel', the tears actually rolled down my face. I said to myself: 'I *won't* break, I *won't* go under, I *will* get well, by God, I will, and I'll take care of her and protect her against all the world. . . . Oh, Zel', I love you so! You're so *good* to me! You're an angel, that's what you are, a blessed, glorious angel, and I'm just a selfish, inconsiderate *beast*. . . ."

His handsome eyes swam with tears.

She pushed back his tumbled black hair and kissed his forehead.

"Don't worry, sweetheart; you're all right."

"With three shows to-morrow and three the day after that, and three the day after that! G-god, I ask you! It would break down the constitution of a horse. . . . And I'm a sick man, Zel', a very sick man."

She did not mind taking care of him although he was an exacting invalid. Often she used to think there was never any end to his demands. At least she had him to herself, where she could watch him, she knew where he was, what he was doing, and at last, they were beginning to save a little. He must have all sorts of medicines, bromo, a laxative, a hot-water bottle, a chest-rub recommended by some casual person he happened to meet, he must have a hack to take him, now and then, to the theatre and bring him home. All these things cost money, but not as much, by any means, as the things for which he threw the dollars away when he was well, and he had them to spend as he pleased.

They crossed the state line into California in the spring, and even within the shadow of snow-capped Shasta, were running past scattered orchards of blossoming fruit trees, stretches of pink and white petals, rolling away like open scrolls to the edge of the rugged,

rising ground that hemmed them in, their outer edges stopped by the first jagged line of mountain pine. Farms, dairies, cattle, fences, pastures, shingled roofs with smoke curling from stovepipe chimneys, patches of red earth where gold had once been hid, wild flowers spotting the fields, growing out of the cinders beside the tracks, heavens of transcendental blue, and sunshine, exhilarating, glorious sunshine, floods of it, batches of it, armfuls of it. Zelda, clutching the rusty gate on the platform of the last car, wanted to fling her arms wide and scream in her joy at being back again in California.

Oh, George must come to see it and feel it and breathe it! She had left him back in their car, slumped down in his seat, reading an old copy of the *Saturday Evening Post*. He would not want to come, but she would *make* him. It was all too wonderful, too entrancingly beautiful. She started to retrace the long bumpy way through intervening sleepers to the tourist car. A woman in one of the sections she passed was gazing out of the window, smiling pleasantly.

"Isn't it *glorious*?" Zelda cried impulsively, as she hurried by.

"Yes, it's glorious," the woman answered, and her tone matched Zelda's.

But as Zelda pushed open the dusty door of their own car, and entered its familiar atmosphere of litter and confusion, she stopped dead, her high spirits dashed. George sat in one of the made-up sections, Van beside him, Bender and Rus Hayden opposite, and upon the table between them, were cards and chips.

"Just a little penny-ante," he said to her in quick nervousness, meeting her eye and looking away again with a preoccupied frown; "it's so damned stupid, Zel', sitting here all day with nothing to do. We don't get to Sacramento until. . . . Say, what time do we get to Sacramento, Van? Who knows what time we get to Sacramento? . . . Give me two."

Zelda drew a long breath and went to sit by Maud de Reszke whom she had grown to like during the weeks of intimacy. It *would* be a long day, and if George would only be reasonable and play for modest stakes, she would not have minded this diversion of cards. But she knew so well how the fever of gambling affected him, and how as the game progressed, the stakes would grow higher and higher. But more than the risk he ran of losing what little she had helped him to save of late, more than the excitement of the game which always whipped his blood to a mad pace, distorting mind and vision, his gambling on this particular morning sickened and saddened her. It meant her hold on him was over, it meant the end of his "goodness," of their pleasant companionship, it meant a return to his old ways. He was well again; he needed her no longer. . . . A scurvy trick for California to play on her!

§ 5

"My dear, you'll never regret it; it will make you a thousand times prettier. You're just afraid of being called a 'bleached blonde,' that's all, and men don't give a hang whether you're bleached or not so long as you're pretty. Why don't you do it? Just a good rinse, and after a couple of times, you won't know yourself."

"I'd do it, Zelda, if I was you. Mildred's dead right; you've only got your looks in this business, and it's up to you to make the most of 'em."

"Darling, I could make you look so sweet! Blond hair and black eyebrows. You'd look lovely!"

"Go ahead and surprise George. He'll go dippy when he sees you."

Maud lay on the bed, a spotted, torn blue silk wrapper around her uncorseted figure, and in an old plush-covered S-backed chair, Mildred, also in negligée, sat, her bare feet curled beneath her, sprinkling cigarette ashes over the worn and faded carpet. Outside, Mission

Street was drenched in morning fog, and beneath the window of the room in which the three women had congregated, a "rags-bottles-sacks" man lifted his wail. Zelda, diverted for a moment, thought how dear and "homey" it sounded.

She had often considered bleaching her hair. She stood now before her mirror, looking at her reflection, her long tawny mane, which she had been vigorously combing and brushing, tumbling in easy ripples over her shoulders. It *was* lovely hair, and a pity not to make more of it; its lustrelessness attracted nobody's attention.

"It's your looks that count in this business," Millie repeated. "It's the folks out front first, and the folks in behind second, and the Isadores and the Isaacs upstairs that's third, and it's those birds who squint their little pig eyes at you and take a good look at your phiz, before they ever ask you what your specialty is."

Well, that was true, too, and she and George would shortly be looking for a job. It was the last week of the Sullivan & Considine engagement.

"Oh, go on, Zel'; you're a fool not to."

"Be a sport, Zelda. You'll look like a million dollars, I promise you."

Zelda thought of the dirty, shabby Wigwam, the rowdy, second-rate theatre, " 'way out in the Mission," of which as a girl she had but vaguely heard and never seen, the dusty, shabby neighborhood, the cheap, rooming house over a grocery in which all of their company had found accommodations, and thought of meeting Boylston, and—and some of her old acquaintances. When she had quitted San Francisco eighteen months before to join the Meserves in Los Angeles, and had departed with them, a member of the Company, Ned's protegée, the "little Frisco pick-up," she had pictured a far more brilliant return than this to her beloved City of the Hills. Staring into her own eyes in the glass before her, she realized she had changed since leaving

home; she was more mature, sophisticated, a little hard about her eyes and mouth, but she had gained in poise, in self-assurance.

"Coarsened perhaps." She thought the words definitely, as she gazed at her image, but her lips did not move. Well, wasn't it to be expected? Cheap theatres, cheap boarding houses, cheap experiences?

If she felt and looked tired, nobody among her old acquaintances in San Francisco must ever suspect or see it. There was that money in her suitcase; she'd tell George about it now, and spend half of it on new clothes, a new dress, a new hat, and if then she happened to meet a friend of former days on Market or Kearny Streets, why then. . . . She could hear herself explaining:

"Oh, yes; I'm in vaudeville now. It pays so much better than the legit'. My husband and I are here just for a week, join the Orpheum circuit next, open in Los Angeles. . . . Oh, I'm having such a good time. It's really lots of fun being on the stage, particularly vaudeville where you only work for a few minutes in the evenings and the matinée days. . . ."

Suddenly aloud:

"Come on, girls; get the poison and let's have it over."

§ 6

The transformation, when completed, delighted her beyond her wildest dreams. Mildred and Maud enjoyed themselves thoroughly in experimenting upon her with peroxide, mascaro, and rouge. The change they wrought was marvellous.

"Maybe all artificial, maybe all varnish and veneer, but it makes me beautiful!" sang Zelda's heart. "I've always been kind of pretty, I *know* I've been kind of pretty and people have thought so, but my goodness, I never thought I'd be actually *beautiful!*"

And she was. Everybody complimented her, every-

body raved about her, everybody sang her praises, George most of all.

"Gee, Zelda kid, you certainly look out of sight. You're a knock-out, an eyeful. Makes your old hubby mighty proud to say: 'Look there, boys, that's my frau.' Makes their eyes pop, I can tell you. Gee, no more S. & C. time for this chicken with a wife that looks like you. No sir-ee, I'm going to see Morrison first thing next week."

He was overjoyed too about the money; his eyes widened with pleasure and surprise.

"You don't say so, you don't say so! How much you got? Seventy-eight? Seventy-eight whole simoleons? Well, by Jiminy, isn't that great! Say, you're an old cutie, know that, Zel'? Just a sly old cutie. Come, give your hubby a kiss. . . . Gee, that dough certainly comes in handy with me having to see Morrison next week. We'll both blow ourselves to some new rags. Billy knows a fellow here that will make me a suit to order for twenty-five, and I want to get me a nifty raglan overcoat, loose, you know, from the shoulder, and a new Derby, maybe light brown. . . ."

She gave him half the sum she had mentioned, thirty-nine dollars, she made it an even forty. Of the exact amount of the balance, she said nothing. Her little hoard was past the hundred mark. Of what use to tell George the truth? He would appreciate it not one jot the more, and would fling it away in one ridiculous extravagance. A suit, a raglan overcoat, a Derby hat? She doubted if she would ever see any of them. But in this she was mistaken. The light coffee-colored hat made its appearance, but some weeks later she herself sent the old, pleated, belted tan overcoat to the cleaner's.

The money meant everything to her at the moment. She was in love with her new appearance, and new clothes she must have. One final hard week at the Wigwam, three a day, and five performances on Saturday

and Sunday, and then rest, rest for ten days or a fortnight, or until George signed up with Morrison. He was more determined than ever on the break. The Haydens, Maud, Mabel, Van, they could go on if they wanted to, but not for him; a new road show could be organized but not one including Selby and Marsh; they were destined for higher altitudes.

"Why, damn it, kid," George said to Zelda in his emphatic way, "what's the use of our piddling along at sixty a week when we can get two hundred in 'big time'? . . . Oh, you listen to me; I know what I'm talking about. Morrison will pay two hundred for our act and be glad to book us; we've got the sketch into shape now; it's snappy and a novelty. I'm through with this backwoods stuff and five shows a day. I'm going to live like a white man. My God, Zelda, I should think you'd be the one to egg me on to something better! I'm throwing my talents away on this cheap vaudeville game, and I'm doing it just so's we can be together. Why, if you aren't with me in this, it would be a damn sight better for you to go back to Boulanger's and let me go on the road playing juveniles in the 'legit.'"

His words stung, but she made no retort. After all, there wasn't much to say. He could go his way if he wanted to. She could always look up Boylston or find some other man to take care of her. . . . No-no, not that again; she could never go back to that kind of life. . . . But if George thought she was hampering him! . . . This way of thinking was ridiculous! He needed her; he could not get along without her, and if he didn't know it, she did. She would never leave him no matter how inconsiderate and mean he was to her.

"I was only wondering," she said in her usual tone, "if Morrison might not——"

"You leave Morrison to me."

"Aren't the Orpheum turns booked in Chicago?"

"Well say, can't Morrison do what he likes in his

own organization? He's one of the principal stockholders, and I guess what he says goes."

"But if he can't use us?"

"Ah gee, Zel', sometimes you give me a pain. Always croaking, croaking! Maybe we'll starve or maybe Vanderbilt will telegraph us to come on and amuse his kids, or maybe we'll fly to the moon! . . . G-god, you certainly can gloom!"

§ 7

It was far more of a wrench than she had anticipated to say good-bye to her late companions of the road show when, on the Sunday following the week's engagement at the Wigwam, they prepared to cross the Bay and re-establish connections with the tourist sleeper and the faithful Burns.

Zelda had expected to go with them as far as the Oakland Mole, if for no other reason than to see the old negro once again, but she was prevented from carrying this plan into effect. The Haydens, Bender, Van, Maud, herself and George had arranged to have one farewell party together before separating, and Zelda had guided them to a certain Italian restaurant in the Latin Quarter where once, long ago, the Doctor had taken her, and there, George, from too many cocktails before the meal and from too much red wine during it, fell heavily asleep and could not be roused. He sat slumped down in his place at the table, his chin on his chest, his face deathly white.

"You suppose he's all right?" Zelda asked Van Sands in a worried voice. She had seen George many times under the influence of liquor but she had never seen him affected this way before.

"Sure thing," Van reassured her lightly; "Georgie poured it in a little too fast, zat's all. Dago Red sometimes hits a fellow that way. . . . Say, Zel', when am I going to see you again? Ever? You know I never met

a girl like you before. You're a square-shooter, that's what you are, a square-shooter, an' I never believed they made 'em that way before. Women 're grafters an' leg-pullers I've always said, but you're a square-shooter if there ever was one. Now George, he don't appreciate you, a little bit. He isn't good enough for you, Zel'. Takes a man that knows something of the world to appreciate a woman like you. *I'd* appreciate you, Zel', if you was *my* wife. You bet I would. . . . You know I'm crazy about you, Zel', you know I've always been crazy about you, ever since that first night we met in Winnipeg. Say, Zel', if you should ever decide to quit George. . . ."

"Sit up and behave yourself, Van, or I'll move round by Maud."

All of them had had too much to drink, Zelda decided. Coarse and common they might be, yet she had grown extraordinarily fond of them, even of "Toots" Bender; kindly, generous, simple-hearted, she thought them, and the memories of countless adventures and misadventures, good and bad times, would bind them together for the rest of life.

"Sorry I can't cross the Bay with you," Zelda said as the time of departure drew near; "I wanted to see old Burnsie again. Give him this, will you; it's a little joke, a brass locket I picked up in Chinatown and I cut some hairs off of Buster's tail, tied 'em together with a bow of baby-ribbon and put 'em inside. He'll love it, I know. Here's a *real* present for him, but you give him the other one first. . . .

"Write me once in a while, Millie; I don't expect a regular letter, you know, but just a postal now and then to let me know where you and Rus are. I'll give you the address of the place I always stop at when I'm in New York. And, Maud dear, let me know if you land the Count; his wife may die any day; and I want to know about the little girl. I know people *do* get well. Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't begin to cry, Maud, or you'll get

us all started. It isn't as if we weren't ever going to see each other again. . . .

"Be a good boy, Rus, look out for Millie, and don't let this card-sharp here get all your money. Why you boys are willing to play poker with a man who does card tricks for a living, is more 'an I can see. . . .

"Good-bye, 'Toots.' Take care of yourself, and learn some new tunes. I'll never hear 'The Bandanna Rag' without thinking of you. . . .

"So long, Van; I won't forget you. You can write if you like, but don't expect an answer. Save your money, and get married, that's my advice to you. . . . Oh, just help me get him into a hack, and I'll get him home. I can always manage George. . . .

"Got a lot of things to thank you for, Millie, but I'll always be eternally grateful to you and Maud for the pink hair. It's put new life into me and makes me feel ten years younger. Oh, yes, a regular High School girl. . . . Good-bye, my dear; good-bye—good-bye. Don't forget to give Burnsie my love. I'm so sorry not to be able to say 'Hello' to him again. Oh, goodness gracious, don't carry on so! You know I love you and I'll never forget you. Tell Mabel I meant to come over, and tell her to be careful and not break her neck. . . . Good luck! . . . Good-bye!"

The crowded cab rolled away, hands fluttering from its windows, Rus Hayden waving his hat, cries of farewell filling the street. At the corner it turned and was lost to view. Zelda stood at the curb before her own waiting vehicle, one hand over her heart, her lips pressed hard against one another; then she gave the address to the driver, stooped beneath the cab's low door, and seated herself beside the inert, sprawling figure within.

CHAPTER VI

§ 1

ZELDA paused long enough in her idle chewing of the curtain string to draw a deep breath and to say with great weariness:

"Oh, what a life, what a life!"

Buster, thinking she spoke to him, looked up, cocking his ears, while his stub of a tail beat the floor. His mistress ignored him and continued to frown upon the eddying tides of people surging up and down Powell Street. She and George had been at the Golden West Hotel for over a month now, a dreadful place, she thought it, with flimsy floors and partitions, catering to the rowdiest element of the "tenderloin"; the racketing at night, particularly on Saturday, was terrible; she sometimes wondered why it was not raided. George insisted upon remaining there. He was in the centre of things, he asserted, in touch with theatrical people and affairs. She knew his real reason: he was in touch with the hangers-on and the daily frequenters of Emeryville!

Immediately after their friends of the road show had departed south, they had moved from the cheap room they had occupied over the grocery in the Mission to this caravansary of riot and revelry. George had claimed that it was important for them to be living at a hotel, a well-known one, where they could be easily located when Morrison wanted them.

"He mustn't think we're fly-by-nights," he had told his wife. The Golden West was the place to go; it was centrally located; everybody knew where it was, it was reasonable, it was the hotel patronized by all the vaudeville head-liners.

"It's just a question whether we can afford it, George," Zelda had said indifferently.

"Oh, you leave that to me. I'll take care of all that. We'll only be there for a couple of weeks."

He had been so sure of success, so confident of Morrison's wanting them, that after he had made a vain attempt to see this important person, and had come back to her, fuming, bewildered, aggrieved, her heart had ached for him more than it had ever ached for anybody in her life.

"He just wouldn't see me, that's all," George had told her, blinking at her, round-eyed with the look of a hurt child. "Wouldn't see me! Wouldn't see me! What do you know about that? I ask you. I sent in my name,—damn it, I should have had an engraved card but I never thought of it!—and I says to the boy: 'Mr. Selby of New York,' and he says to me, 'What's your business, Mr. Selby?' Now, how the devil was I going to tell him to tell Morrison we had a cat-and-dog act that was——" His voice broke sharply. Zelda had felt her own eyes misting, not because of disappointment, but because she had wanted to take George's head in her arms and rock it and rock it and stop the pain she knew was tearing him. Pathetic, forlorn, pitiful, he had seemed, standing thus before her, the new brown Derby aslant upon his head, his gloves that he had buttoned so fastidiously upon leaving her, dangling limply in his hands, his bamboo cane which he was forever swishing jauntily to and fro, hanging forlornly by its crooked handle on his arm; but it was his face, the look of distress, of schoolboy grief upon it, that had wrung her heart.

"I says to him, I says, 'It's Mr. Selby, Mr. *George* Selby of New York,' " George repeated, conquering his trembling lip. " 'Sorry,' he says, 'Mr. Morrison's busy. You can write,' he says. That's a good one, ain't it? Write him! 'Dear Mr. Morrison, we've got a great cat-and-dog act we'd like to show you. The cat can walk on

her hind legs, and the dog can balance on the tip of his nose——'"

"Don't!" Zelda remonstrated.

"Well, it's a good one, ain't it? Write him!"

"It mightn't do any harm."

"Ockkkk. . . ." The ejaculation of disgust silenced her.

"Wouldn't even talk to me," he went on; "wouldn't even make an appointment. I says to the boy, 'Can't I come to-morrow when Mr. Morrison isn't so busy?' And all he can say is, 'Write it!' I ask you. Write it! Write it! Write it! Who ever buys anything you *write* about?"

There had been much more of this, a long, wearisome tirade. He wept presently, throwing himself on the bed, his head pressed into the pillow, rolling from side to side, swearing, sobbing, blubbering. Shame for him, pity for him, sympathy for him tugged one way and another. Zelda could not bear to see him cry; it made her cheeks burn.

"Don't—don't, *please* don't, George," she kept urging. There had seemed no way to reach him. Distraught, she had rung for a bellboy, sent him fetching lemons, sugar and a pitcher of steaming hot water, and with whiskey she found in George's bag, mixed him a long strong drink. It had been the concoction he had loved to take from her when he had been ill in the north. Persuading him to undress, she helped him into bed, and directly he sat up, bolstered by pillows, sipping the mixture, and shortly afterwards slumped over on his side and his heavy breathing announced he slept.

That was a month ago, and a long, terrible month of worry and wretched makeshifts it had been. In that interval, they had made the acquaintance of Cohen's Amusement Bureau.

"I won't have anything to do with such a person or such an agency," George had railed when the character of the bureau and the services of Mr. Cohen had

been suggested by another stranded vaudeville couple whose acquaintance in the hotel they had casually made; "I know all about such vermin. I won't have anything to do with him. I'm not sunk so low as that, by God."

"Well, just how do you propose we're going to live?" Zelda had asked, coldly.

Cohen's Amusement Bureau was what its name purported it to be. Conducted by Mr. Jake Cohen, it supplied to country fairs, small town celebrations, men's club dinners, communities or gatherings, wherever these might be, any sort of entertainment desired. Something for the little tots? He had it. Something for the Church Guild's social to help raise money for the Sunday School carpet? He had it. Something snappy and a bit juicy for the annual get-together jamboree of Parlor Number 34, N. S. G. W.? He had it. Something for the three-day carnival at Livermore, or the May Day Festival at Stockton, or the Horse-racing Meet and Cattle Show at Fresno, or the outing of the employees of The Fuller Paint Company at Schuetzen Park? He had it. Clowns, acrobats, ballad singers, trick bicycle riders, tight-rope walkers, monologists, Punch-and-Judy Shows, jugglers, sleight-of-hand performers,—he had them all. And what a motley, alarming, unholy crew they seemed! One glimpse of their sharp, peaked, blotched and bloated faces was enough to fill even Zelda's callous heart with dismay. She, who knew her San Francisco fairly well, was hard put to it to say from what purlieus of ignorance and vice these weird and dreadful creatures had come. Pimply-faced boys in their teens with depraved, insipid faces, girls of even younger age already marked with degeneracy, fat, large-busted women with unctuous voices, and shifty, watery-eyed men with nervous, twitching hands and faces. Standing in their midst, for the first time since her hair was dyed, she had been uncomfortably aware of its bleached appearance. She had found her conscious fingers touching it here and there

as if to press it out of sight beneath her hat. George, with his brown Derby riding his head at an angle and his belted, fawn-colored, pleated overcoat, had seemed as cheap, and as rowdy as those about him.

On that first visit to Jake Cohen's waiting-room, she had drunk deep of humiliation. She had even been sorry she had brought Buster with her, and that these weak-faced boys and girls and these coarse, boozy-voiced women and bleary-eyed men should pat and play with him. George's haughty aloofness had not helped matters. He had needed no herald to trumpet his opinion of the riff-raff surrounding him. He had refused to sit, had stood with his hat upon his head, engrossed in the day's newspaper, and had smoked with his cigar tilted in his mouth, flicking its ash now and then to the floor without a glance as to where it fell.

Cohen had sent them first to Santa Cruz, a tedious three-hour trip of many stops, and in that roistering community by the sea, as part of a slipshod, slap-stick vaudeville entertainment in a local beer hall, they had given three performances each day on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday for which they had been engaged. Next, two days in Watsonville, three in San Jose, and half a week in Petaluma, north of San Francisco, reached by a different ferry and railway system. A wretched, unsatisfactory existence, toting their luggage and their animals, a night or two in an uncomfortable country hotel, back to San Francisco in dusty, plush-seated day coaches, the Golden West again, until a call from Cohen's Bureau sent them forth once more upon the road. Zelda had thought she had touched low water mark when she had been part of the road show, shunted from town to town, playing half-weeks in the raw cities of the Northwest, but these days of hardship exceeded anything she had ever before experienced.

She had not been able to blame George for the despondency that had settled upon him, the grouchiness with which he had accompanied her to these raw Cali-

fornia towns with their lines of dust-covered buggies, farm wagons and occasional motor cars standing along the single paved street, their men in flopping straw hats and faded, suspendered overalls, their women in dowdy percales and badly-fitting corsets, who stared at them with their cat and dog as though they were the offscourings of an iniquitous world.

Oh, it had been hard, unsatisfactory and disagreeable, but even so, it was preferable to their present existence, for during those week days when there was no call from the Bureau, George had found an occupation for his idle afternoon hours by crossing the Bay to watch the horses run at the Emeryville track. He had not had at first the price of transportation and ticket of admission to the Park. Small bets of two dollars at a time with the cigar dealer in the lobby of the hotel had been all he had been able to afford. Now and then he won, six, eight, ten dollars. It eked out their meagre income, and often paid their hotel bill. In the beginning, Zelda had followed his small operations with interest. Reading the racing news each morning in the papers, she had grown familiar with the names of the horses, and had come to know when one on which George had previously made a successful wager, was in the field again.

Upon a long dusty train ride, perhaps to Santa Rosa to fill a week-end engagement, she would clutch her newspaper and say with quick eagerness in her voice:

"Look—look! Tony Faust in the fourth, six furlongs! Didn't you bet on him a few days ago and make a killing?"

He would turn on her a weary, disapproving look, marking the spot where his eye had been on the racing chart in his hand with the point of a pencil.

"Killing!" he would repeat scornfully, "killing! I played him for place and made exactly four dollars!"

"Well, you won."

"Yep, I won."

"And aren't you going to play him to-day?"

"How can I tell," he would answer irritably, "when I have to run off to jerk-water towns like this and go through a lot of antics to make a crowd of roughnecks guffaw? I'd be showing a whole lot more common sense by staying in Frisco and watching what odds I could get on this nag. . . . Sure, I think he'll win, but I'm not going to put up ten simoleons to win four!"

That had been the way of it at the start, and Zelda had truly loved those first days of excitement when George would take her into his confidence and say, pointing to the name of a horse:

"See that filly, 'Queen of Diamonds'? She's a great stepper. Got a tip on her. Playing her straight across the board, two and two and two."

"And if she wins what will you make, George?"

Such a question would bring a scowl. He might snap: "How do I know what the odds will be?" or silence her with: "Figure it out for yourself."

Looking back she could honestly say she had seen no harm in it at first. It had been gambling, that was true, and she had known how gambling affected her husband, but his modest weekly winnings had been so welcome, so necessary! They could not have gone on living even in the makeshift sort of way they did, if it had not been for these extra dollars that came trickling in. It had not seemed particularly wrong; it had not seemed reckless. George had almost always won; not every race, but each week he had been ten to twenty dollars to the good.

And then on every free day, he had begun to go to the track and Zelda had gone with him, and had sat in the grand stand watching the crowd and listening to the band while he roamed the betting ring downstairs, coming back to her flushed and excited before each race, whispering:

"'Daisy Bell,' show and place, three to one and even money;" or, "'Dancing Girl'; I took a chance on her,

the odds seemed right, five to one, and I just risked a couple she'd romp home."

Pleasant days. Zelda had thoroughly enjoyed them. It had been fun to get up late in the mornings when they did not have an out-of-town engagement, loiter over their noontime breakfast at Campi's, just across the street from the hateful Orpheum, and catch an early boat for Emeryville, reading the "dope" of the various tipsters, deciding how and where they should make their bets; and it had been fun to feel themselves part of the noisy, chattering throng streaming toward the track, beautiful in its settings of gracious lawns, rose beds, and glittering with gay pennants in the brilliant April sunshine; and best of all, it had been fun, after watching the six thrilling contests of speed, the winning horse and the winning jockey each time returning to the crowded grand stand to receive the merited bursts of applause, to turn their own faces homeward with the jingle of more dollars in George's pocket than had been there before.

Such a little while ago, those days! Zelda, sighing at her hotel window and watching the shifting scene in the street below, hated to remember her pleasure in them.

George had presently declared he was done forever with Mr. Jake Cohen and his Amusement Bureau.

"No, sir-ee, I'm never going back there. I can make more money following the ponies, and, by God, I prefer to make it that way."

She realized then what she had done in countenancing this interest. Too late now to hold him back, too late now to stop him. In the phraseology of the horse talk he loved to gabble, he had the bit in his teeth and was running head free and wild.

"You'll be cautious; you won't plunge," was all she could advise, but this had only brought a scowl to his face, the scowl that was ever more and more frequently there, and an irritated grunt.

That had been the worst of it, the change that had come over him. One would be hard put to it, she thought, to recognize in the sullen, morose, abstracted individual, always with his shiny, black leather notebook in his hands, the jovial, skylarking, fun-loving and fun-making man she had married. That shiny, black leather notebook! How she had come to loathe the sight of it! Always before his eyes, always in his hands, always convenient to draw from his pocket when they were lunching or dining together or whenever a chance hour offered some opportunity for their old companionship! At once it would absorb him. "Past performances!" She hated the term. "Past performances," always and everlastingly, "past performances." This horse had beaten that horse at five furlongs on a muddy track in January, and that horse had outrun a third the same distance on a fast track two weeks later; wasn't it a reasonable supposition therefore that the first horse would win from the third horse in to-day's race even though the "go" had been increased to six furlongs? Eternal conjecturing, eternal surmising, eternal deducing. It bored her. What mattered it to her now whether George won or lost? He rarely told her the day's results. He rarely told her anything. When in her company, he was usually silent, studying the pages of his shiny, black leather notebook, or making pencil jottings on a memorandum card. But once in contact with any of the men who made horse-racing a source of livelihood, and who were always to be found lounging about the lobby of the Golden West, he would talk volubly enough, gesticulating, pounding his palm with an open fist, walking up and down, once again the old George familiar to her.

He bet heavily now. At one time she knew he was several hundreds ahead. But whether ahead or behind, it made small difference in his gloomy, preoccupied manner. All his gaiety seemed to evaporate; only at rare intervals could he be won to his old nonsense, and

this only after an unusually successful day at the track or when over a good dinner, among a crowd of his roistering friends, he overindulged himself in drink. She realized to her bitter shame that she no longer had the same feeling about his talking too much. She grew so weary of his testiness that even his tipsy good-nature was welcome.

"And I don't even care," she found herself thinking aloud in a rising flood of self-pity, "whether or not he makes a fool of himself any longer. . . ."

What days of profitlessness they were! What days of unreality! What days of boredom and anxiety!

No more did she accompany George to the track. He did not want her with him. It interfered, he said, with his "chewing the rag" with other race-track followers on the way over, it prevented him from picking up tips, it hampered his operations. She was satisfied to remain at home; there was no pleasure in going to Emeryville any more. She had plenty of money,—George would every now and then toss her a twenty or a fifty-dollar bill,—and she was content to stay in the city and spend it. She bought herself some clothes, and she had the satisfaction of knowing that she had never appeared better dressed, nor more beautiful. Men and women noticed her when she went out walking with Buster; their heads turned after she had passed and their eyes followed her. Sometimes the men themselves followed her, and more than once she was accosted. At rowdy dinner or supper parties, in which occasionally she found herself with George, and casual acquaintances in the hotel, or of the track, loud-voiced, drinking men and women, the former frankly tried to make love to her. There was small gratification from that sort of admiration, and their wives, or the women who were with them, made sneering remarks to one another about her for her hearing. Mornings she remained in bed, afternoons she spent wandering with Buster in and out of shops or in walks at the Beach,

evenings in George's frowning, silent company, while he pasted the day's track results in his shiny black leather notebook, studying and figuring until midnight, or in the society of his coarse-mouthed, illiterate, philandering race-track cronies.

And it was thinking of this enervating and thoroughly unsatisfactory round of her days that made her cry aloud as she stood at the hotel window, idly chewing the curtain string and gazing down upon the shuffling throng below:

"Oh, what a life, what a life!"

§ 2

Upon a certain day some time before this, she had arrayed herself in her new imitation pony coat, and her black velvet hat from which curled a long ostrich feather that swept close to the nape of her neck and hugged her golden hair, had gloved her hands immaculately, and with one of them thrust into her new muff, and the fingers of the other entwined in Buster's leash, had set forth upon a slow saunter toward a familiar neighborhood in the city. As her progress had brought her nearer and nearer her goal, she had been reminded of the last time, the Sunday morning three years ago, when she had made that same pilgrimage, and, as before, her heart had begun to beat, and a fine tremor affect hands and lips as the houses, street corners and landmarks of her girlhood revived old memories and old sensations. At the junction of Van Ness Avenue and Sacramento Street, she had looked up the hill and had glimpsed her uncle's home with the marguerite bushes and the fuchsias flowering in the front yard, and had turned away with the same hot wave of resentment. And again, as on the former occasion, she had crossed the street and from the further side, approached the little white cottage, hiding shyly behind its white palings and its wicket gate amongst its beds of violets and calla lilies

standing opposite the Chinese laundry and next the corner grocery. And there she had found it, just as so often she had dreamed of it, but with no "To Let" signs in the windows now, nor even the looped lace curtains with which the tenant she had known had always draped them, but sheer net ones, divided in the middle, an alien touch. No other change. The same languishing garden, the same white picket fence, a little more rickety perhaps, a bit more chipped of paint. Yes, one other different note: on the worn steps,—the three little wooden steps that led from the brick walk to the shallow porch and the door with its centre iron bell handle,—lay an afternoon paper, rolled tightly and bent in the middle, flung there by a passing newsboy making his deliveries.

Up and down the block, Zelda had slowly walked, wondering what she would say, wondering what she would do, if the door of the little cottage should suddenly fly open and grinning-faced Michael should come bounding out, taking the three steps as he had always taken them, in a single bound. And as she wondered, the door had actually swung wide, sending her breath from her body, her heart into her throat, but only a bent old man had appeared, a weazened, white-haired old man with a large paper bundle under his arm, who stooped, picked up the rolled evening paper, and poked it in his jacket's pocket. Rooted where she stood, with the dog jerking at her hand, and the blood roaring in her ears, Zelda had watched and watched until the bent old figure had turned the corner by the Presbyterian Church and disappeared.

Then, after a little time, she had wandered on until she had come to the cross street below, to the corner of bustling, busy Polk Street, with its bobbing, trundling cable cars, and had paused there by the curb in front of the grocery, and her eyes had drifted up and down the familiar thoroughfare, noting old names, old shops and stores in and out of which, as a gawky schoolgirl,

she had passed so many times: Val Schmidt's Drug Store, Van Bibber's Bazaar, Bibo's Grocery, Mrs. Guggenheim's Toy Shop, Ferran's Laundry, Galli's Fine Wines & Liquors, Robert's Candy Parlor.

Standing thus, she had repeated these names half aloud and sadly to herself, and then had allowed Buster to tug her across the street, and at Val Schmidt's had paused, entered to find the old man with his silvery hair and white goatee behind the counter as she had so often seen him, wrapping his drugs and bottles in pale green paper, and tying them with pink string. And she had asked in a voice that had failed her at first, if he could tell her if Mrs. Michael Kirk, the music teacher, still lived in the neighborhood.

"Kirk, Kirk? Sure, I remember Mrs. Kirk," the old man had frowned, jerking his beard. "Lived on Sacramento Street, just beyond the grocery. Oh, she ain't been 'round these parts in years. I ain't seen or heard of her in a long time."

"And the cottage where she used to live, does she still own it?"

"Can't say as to that. Mr. Gustaf Knutzen lives there now. He's a cabinet maker, has his workshop in the rear,"—his workshop in the rear! She knew the place! —"and makes real fine furniture."

At the door, with its familiar bell that tinkled when it opened and shut, she had hesitated another moment, tempted to ask one more question, a question concerning Caleb Burgess and his wife, had thought better of it, and with a murmured "Thank you," had passed out, closing the portal to its parting jingle, and still at a leisurely pace, had strolled upon her way, retracing her steps in the waning light of the afternoon, to the clatter and tumult of the Golden West.

And in their disordered room, scattered with her own stray garments and some of his, full of stale air and thick with cigar smoke, she had found George,

frowning under the electric light, puzzling over the pages of his shiny, black leather notebook.

§ 3

Upon another afternoon, she had been drying her hair after a rinse, and had been sitting, bent over, alternately brushing and combing it, its golden glory hanging about her face like a curtain, shutting out the light. Again she had been thinking of old days and old faces, and presently had straightened, full of a sudden thought, had shaken back the yellow mane about her shoulders, had touched a bell in the wall, and when the boy had answered, had asked him to bring a telephone directory.

A few minutes later, with the limp-covered book spread across her knees, she had slowly jerked her finger tip down a column of names.

Boston—Bowles—Boyd—Boyle—*Boylston!*

There it was, "Dr. Ralph B. . . . Hotel St. Dunstan." No longer in the Fuller Building nor at the California Hotel! She had pencilled the number on a corner of the page, and torn off the paper. An hour later, she had asked the operator in the hotel lobby to get it for her, and had found herself, with a beating heart, shut into one of the booths, the telephone receiver at her ear.

His voice shocked her when it came to her over the wire, sounding so intimate, so extraordinarily familiar; it seemed but yesterday since she had heard it.

"Who is it?"

"Zelda."

"Who?"

"It's Zelda, Zelda Marsh; you remember me, don't you?" She had laughed a little at that. Silence. A fumbling at the other end.

"I'm in town for a few weeks," she had continued.

"Thought I'd say 'Hello.' . . . You know, I'm married now." Still nothing. More fumbling. An embarrassed clearing of his throat.

"You're what? What did you say?"

"I'm married; I'm here with my husband."

She had wanted him to get the full benefit of that. Another interval. In the darkness of the booth she had smiled at his embarrassment.

"Where are you?" he had asked after a moment. "Can I call you up in a few minutes? I'm very busy right this moment. If you give me your 'phone number, I'll call you directly."

It had sounded so like him! She had guessed he had wanted to catch his breath; perhaps there had been somebody with him.

She gave him the number and added with satisfaction:

"It's Mrs. Selby, now, Doctor; S-e-l-b-y."

She had had only time enough to stroll to the newsstand and pick up a copy of *The Clipper,* before she was summoned to the booth again.

His tone was now all warmth and cordiality. Zelda in town! Well, that was an unexpected pleasure! How was she? And married? Well, that was splendid! He was delighted, so glad for her, and he must see her. Should he call or would she meet him some place? Then:

"You know, *I'm* married too, Zelda."

"You're what?"

His embarrassed cough and laugh again.

"Oh, yes, we old duffers do it once in a while."

"Why, Doctor!"

"Yep, I'm a bridegroom; got married couple of months ago."

"You don't tell me!"

"Yep, married my cousin. You must remember her, —guess you met her, didn't you?—Maria Boylston of Stockton?"

"Well, I never!"

"And *you're* married!"

"Oh yes, I've been married some time. My husband and I are both on the stage; out here to join the Orpheum circuit. . . . Yes, vaudeville. It pays so much better than the 'legit.'"

"How long you going to be here?"

"Few days, I guess."

"Well, where and how can I see you? Can't we meet some place? Where'd you suggest?"

"Let's have tea together."

"Fine. Where do you say?"

"How about the Palace? I love the old court, and I haven't been there since we arrived."

"N-n-n-no; I think . . . perhaps . . ."

"How about the new hotel, the St. Francis?"

"N-n-n-no; I think . . . perhaps . . . It's too—too,—well, you know, it's too crowded there in the afternoons and I want to talk. . . ."

"How's old Zinkand's or Techau Tavern?"

"Zinkand's! The very place. But it's 'Tait's Zinkand' now, you know. There won't be a soul there. I'd like to visit the old place in *your* company again. When shall it be? To-morrow?"

Zelda, surveying herself in her mirror the following afternoon, smiled over the results of her careful toilet. Never, she decided, had she been more effectively costumed or so good to look upon. The pony coat on this occasion had remained in the closet on its hanger. She had donned no outer wrap, but wore her new tailored suit, dead black, the coat, long-skirted, form-fitting, unmarred by button or pocket flap, and on her golden crown the black hat with the curling black ostrich plume. Her hands were white-gloved and at the corner flower-stand, she had bought a double bunch of violets and pinned them to her breast. Every step of her progress to the old familiar restaurant on Market Street, she had known from the stares and the turning of heads

that she had not underestimated the effect of her appearance.

In the dim interior of the restaurant where so often she had listened to Herr Stärk and his orchestra, and where she had dined and supped both happily and unhappily, she had found a strange, gray-headed man, sleek and paunchy, sitting at one of the tables, in whom she had startlingly recognized the physician. The same, yet not the same. He had changed in some subtle but definite way. She had not reckoned upon finding him so altered. She knew herself to be different, both inside and out, had expected him to be stirred by her transformation, and the surprised and bewildered look in his eyes and his confusion and awed: "My God, Zelda, you're beautiful, you're *beautiful!* You're a woman, now, a beautiful woman! My dear, you're breathtaking!" had been thoroughly satisfying.

She had looked forward to this meeting partly from curiosity, partly from amusement, partly from genuine friendly interest. Whenever she had thought of the Doctor during the year and a half that she had been away from San Francisco, she had experienced something of a pang of regret. She had pictured him as lonely, as growing old, as missing and wanting her. One glimpse of him now showed that her sympathy had been wasted.

She had told him of herself as briefly and as casually as possible: she was happy, prosperous, on the high road to success, her husband was handsome, clever, had written the sketch in which they were appearing, was generally popular with the public and in the profession. She had said no more. What new fortunes had brought about the change in him interested her. His marriage presumably; she was eager to hear about that. A bit shamefacedly, he informed her. That cousin of his, Maria Boylston of Stockton,—Zelda *must* remember when she and his sister had come down from Stockton to see him when he had been so ill from blood pois-

oning that time!—had inherited quite a sizable fortune, had come to San Francisco to live, had been very sociable and kind to him, and he had fallen into the habit of seeing her almost every day. "Just from plain loneliness, I guess, Zelda." That the money had had something to do with the marriage, he was quite frank to admit. Why not? Maria had not known how to spend it, nor how to enjoy it; he had lost interest in his practice, the zest for living had deserted him after Zelda had gone away. His cousin and himself had seemed two people getting on in years, to whom little of the joy and satisfaction in life was left, and for whom marriage would be a sensible step. Just after the first of the year, the wedding had taken place, and now they were very comfortably established in a beautiful apartment in the Hotel St. Dunstan. He had given up his office, sold his practice, and now only went out when called in consultation.

"And that's the beginning of the last chapter in the story of a very humdrum life," he had finished. "Guess I never treated you rightly, Zelda. . . . Well, I've paid for it. The only real happiness I've ever known in this life was down there in the old office building when we used to have our little feasts together, and you were so pretty and cute with your housekeeping. I threw it all away. . . . But you're happy now, you've got a fine husband and you're both doing well?"

This last had come with a quick change of tone, and as he had turned to her, Zelda had seen the glitter of moisture behind the rimless nose glasses with their fine gold chain hooked over his ear. The mood of light raillery had dropped from her; emotions, old memories had come thronging back. She had gone to this rendezvous with half a thought of testing her groomed appearance and her new beauty upon an old admirer, but now there had arisen within her a wave of bitterness, a realization of how treacherously and selfishly she had been treated by this man,—now misty of eye, fat and

well dressed, firmly established for the rest of his days. In the guise of a friend, he had shut her up, lied to her, hoodwinked and tricked her, and craftily and with cold calculation seduced her. All very well for him now to shed tears of self-pity! Resentment had flamed in her heart, and for a few moments she had toyed with the thought of revenge. How easy to bring his castle of security tumbling about his ears! How easy to disturb the bower in which he and his Maria had snugly ensconced themselves! To test her power, she had lifted her eyes to his, held them a moment, and slowly smiled. That was all. Instantly his face had flamed darkly, his hands had flown to hers and he had caught her fingers.

"Zelda," he had whispered hoarsely, "Zelda, you're beautiful; you're *wonderful!* Still my Zelda, my little Zelda-poppy!"

And at that, with a deep breath, she had withdrawn her hand and risen. To subjugate him again and have him pursuing her, had suddenly seemed profitless, a stupid bore.

"I must go back to my husband." She had stressed the last word faintly.

"Ah—yes,—I suppose . . ." he had faltered, "I suppose you must . . . I suppose that's all over. . . ."

The flash of old passion had been snuffed out. He had slumped in his seat, his face sagging and gray, and Zelda, upon her feet, smoothing the sleek contours of her fine figure, had looked upon him coldly.

And that had been the last of him she had thought she would ever want to see. Her curiosity had been satisfied. He could go back to his Maria, her money, and their spacious suite in the Hotel St. Dunstan, and die there in luxury and self-pity.

"Beast," she had said contemptuously as she had walked up the street. "Beast," she had repeated, stepping from the tarnished gilt elevator cage of her own hotel when it reached her floor, and "Beast" she had

thought as she tried the knob of her door and, finding it unlocked, had opened it.

Within, amid the scattered disorder of her own clothes and some of his, the air stale and thick with the smoke of his cigar, she had found George, frowning under the electric light, puzzling over the pages of his shiny, black leather notebook.

CHAPTER VII

§ 1

One afternoon she wandered into the Alcazar for a matinée performance. It was almost two years since she had been in that theatre, and it was full of associations and happy recollections. Meyerowitz welcomed her, paid tribute to her new beauty and appearance by his enthusiastic, affectionate greeting, and gave her a seat in a box.

But the play she witnessed lacked much of the old quality which had,—it seemed to her,—marked the productions of other years. Many of the favorites she had known and so ardently admired had gone to Broadway, or elsewhere. It was cheaply produced, and badly rehearsed. She wondered, as she left the theatre, how much of the change was in her own altered standards.

The afternoon light of O'Farrell Street was ugly, the gusty air full of chaff; she was conscious of great weariness. There seemed to be nothing left in San Francisco to interest her; friends had disappeared; things were not the same; she turned with disconsolate step toward her hotel, and as she did so, a well-dressed man blocked her way.

"Pardon," he said, hat in hand, "aren't you Zelda Marsh?"

She looked at the wavy lines of his blond, curling hair, at his pale blue eyes, and memory flirted with her. She knew him,—*had* known him years ago,—he was . . . was . . . The tiny bubbles of moisture in the corners of his mouth brought his name suddenly to her lips.

"Gerry Page!" she cried with a breaking smile.

"Sure, Gerry Page. I saw you at the 'mat' and was stumped for a while. I thought you were you all right, but I couldn't account for the . . . for the . . ."

"The wig," she prompted gaily.

"Exactly," he said, relieved. His smiling blue eyes studied her.

"You've grown to be quite a stunner," he went on; "guess you know that."

"Oh, well, we have to keep up appearances," she replied lightly. "I'm on the stage now. Perhaps you haven't heard. I'm married too. My husband and I are in vaudeville, pays so much better than the 'legit,' you know. We're just out here from the east to join the Orpheum circuit; open in Los Angeles next week."

"Is that so? You like the stage?"

"Well enough; it has its good points."

"And variety? You prefer vaudeville to the regular theatre?"

"It isn't such hard work. You only have about twenty minutes at night and three afternoons a week. It gives one so much leisure."

"I like vaudeville myself. Never go to regular shows. They bore me. Every other week I go to the Orpheum. . . . What is it that you do? I mean your specialty. You say your husband. . . ."

"It's a one act sketch. He wrote it himself. It's really very clever. We've been playing it all over the northwest."

"I wish you were going to play it here. I'd love to see you."

"Better come to Los Angeles."

"Well, I might manage that. I travel a good deal. When will you be there?"

"We're-r—we're-r just waiting to hear from the booking office in Chicago. We don't know exactly when they'll want us to go down."

"Then you'll be here for several days still?"

"Yes, I expect to. Until the first of the week at any rate."

"I'd like to see you before you run away; I'd like to talk over old times."

"That might be arranged."

As they chatted, they had turned automatically and proceeded side by side up the street, weaving a jostled progress through the hurrying tide that set against them. Gerry touched her elbow, now and then, guiding her through the press. She liked his solicitude, noted his heavy good-looking tan shoes, his well-fitting tailored clothes, his general smart appearance. There was an air of wealth and breeding about him. She was pleased by his escort, the effect of his tall, well-groomed figure beside her. He had none of George's swagger nor conspicuousness. Obviously a gentleman. Whatever his good or bad qualities, George would never be taken for a man of refinement.

"It certainly is mighty nice to see you again, Zelda. I've often thought of you," Gerry was saying. "Remember the time I took you driving in the Park?"

"Oh, very well."

"I went to Harvard after that, you know, but I didn't stay very long. Matter of fact, I got kicked out. Little youthful hell raising, I'm afraid. Governor was as sore as a crab; made me come home and go to work. I'm in the business now."

"Page & Company?"

"Well, it's Page, Godfrey & Company, now. You remember Phil Godfrey, don't you? Lived next door to you? His old man and mine combined forces. Phil's Sales Manager and I'm supposed to be his chief assistant. Phil's a great old boy; he and I get along fine together. . . . Say, Zelda, what ever became of you? When I got back from college, I asked after you, and somebody told me you'd run away. Is that right?"

"Oh, yes; I had to. My Uncle Caleb wanted me to do something that I didn't want to do, so I skipped."

"It was a row over that Kirk boy, wasn't it? I remember hearing something about it. You and he were going to elope together, wasn't that it? Say, what ever became of him?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"I think Phil told me his mother took him to Europe. . . . Well, what'd you do when you ran away? Where'd you go to?"

"Oh, I went to live with some friends."

"I heard you got married,—married old Boylston, the doctor who used to give us kids those little round pink pills. 'Member 'em?"

"I don't think I was ever sick enough to have him called in."

"Then you didn't marry him?"

"No," she sniffed, "I didn't marry him. I got a job and went on the stage."

"Guess that was all gossip, hey?"

"Pure village slander, I assure you. . . . Say, tell me, Gerry, there's something I want to know: what's happened to my uncle and aunt. I haven't heard of them or from them for years. I've often wondered about them."

"I heard that old Burgess has the gout. Oh, yes, I remember now; Phil was telling me. He can't walk any more and he barks and yells at your aunt all day. Phil said he sees him sometimes in a wheelchair out in the back garden. . . . Say, is this where you're staying?"

Mechanically Zelda had paused in front of the Golden West Hotel, and Gerry, as she stopped, swept its façade with a quick upward glance. It came to her he was not impressed. She started to explain but he cut her short with a pleasant, impatient gesture.

"Oh, that's all right; I don't care anything about where you live. What I want to know is when I'm going to see you again. I've *got* to see you again. There's a barrel of things I want to talk to you about. It's been years, and we've got to catch up. Are you very busy?"

"Not particularly."

"Well say, won't you let me come to see you, or will you let me take you to lunch some day. Would your husband object?"

She did not quite like that.

"I hardly think he'd mind," she said in a level tone.

"How about to-morrow?" Gerry persisted. "Shall I call for you? Please say yes. We'll have a jolly time."

She considered. A picture of George at the lunch table at Campi's frowning into his shiny black leather notebook, ignoring her, rose before her.

"All right," she said; "I'll be ready for you at one."

§ 2

"I'm going out to lunch with an old friend of mine," she told George the next morning. "I met him yesterday at the Alcazar and he asked me. I didn't think you'd mind since I knew you'd be crossing the Bay on an early boat. His name's Gerald Page. His father's quite prominent here, a millionaire, I guess. He used to live across the street from me."

George was shaving in the tiny, dirty-walled bathroom that adjoined their bedroom. At the moment he cut himself and laid down the razor with an oath.

"I don't give a damn who you lunch with," he said irritably, "as long as you don't talk to me when I'm shaving." He peered at his face in the mirror, dabbing the cut with a towel end, repeating at intervals a disgusted "G-god!"

Zelda made no reply. She knew he had lost at the track the day before and for that reason was especially ill-tempered now. It was so boring, so stupid. He was always rude and short with her these days. She drew a deep breath and turned on him with sudden resolution:

"George, how long is this going to keep up?"

"What?"

"This gambling, playing the races."

"How do I know?"

"I won't take that for an answer. I'm not going to stand for it very much longer. I'm sick of it. You're —you're just going to pieces. You're changed; you're different; you're like a man I never saw before. You treat me as though I was nothing in this world to you, as if I amounted to no more than Buster or the cat!"

"What's eating you?" he asked sharply, wheeling about and staring at her, the towel pressed to his face.

"I'll show you what's eating me," she cried, anger unexpectedly creeping into her voice. "I never thought when I married you, I was marrying a common gambler. I hate you, *loathe* you when you're gambling. It changes you completely; it makes a bore and a bum out of you. I won't go on living this way. It's killing me and spoiling what little pleasure I get out of your society even at its best!"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he asked sullenly.

"Do? Do?" she cried, her voice rising sharply. "I'll just walk out on you, that's what I'll do! I'll get a job, don't worry about that."

He scowled. Her heat surprised him. She had never taken quite such a tone with him before.

"Look here," he said sourly, a note of conciliation in his voice, "I'm trying to pull out of this thing just as hard as you want to have me. I need to make one killing, that's all, just one lucky day's all I need. I can clean up two or three thou if I pick 'em right. Two weeks ago, I had just such a streak as that, won every race. Started with ten simoleons an' ran 'em up to three hundred. If I'd be_un with a hundred, I'd of had three thousand just as easy. . . . Listen here, Zel', I'm doing this for you as much as for myself. Maybe you think it's just fun, studying and figuring and trying to guess 'em right. Well, it's a terrible strain, I can tell you. I'm all shot to pieces. You're dead right when you

say it's changed me. I'm a sick man, that's what I am. I'm all wore out. I ought to be in a sanitarium right this minute. Well, I can't quit now; I got to keep on till I make a killing, and it's all for you. You remember when we talked about going to Spain and getting a couple of bikes and doing some pedaling over the country, seeing the old castles and so on? Well, that's what we're going to do this summer, if I just pick 'em right *one* day. Just *one* killing, that's all; just one good day'll fix me right."

"But it will never come, George; it never does," she said sadly.

"What do you mean 'it will never come'? You know that squint-eyed chap they call 'Whitey'? 'Whitey Edwards' his name. Well, he just cleaned up a cool twenty thou early this season, knew he was right and played 'em!"

"I don't care anything about that. It won't happen to you——"

"It won't if you go on crabbing," he cried irritably. "G-god, makes a fellow crazy to have a wife like that! Crabbing—crabbing all the time. Here I'm doing my damnedest, working night and day, sacrificing my career and everything, just so I can make a killing and go off with you on a holiday to Europe, and instead of being with me, encouraging me and pulling for me, all you can do is to *crab!* If that doesn't beat hell! I ask you."

§ 3

She kept her appointment with Gerry Page and he took her to a fascinating café she had never heard of before, ordered expertly a delicious luncheon, and later, drove her out to the Beach in his big handsome Stoddard-Dayton motor car. It was her first ride in an automobile and she loved every moment of it.

"It belongs to the Governor, but he lets me drive it whenever I want," Gerry said.

"How is it you are free on a week-day afternoon?"

she asked. "I thought you were in your father's business."

"Right you are, but you see he thinks I'm out chasing a customer. And so I am, but it happens to be one of my own."

"And by that you mean—?"

"Well, aren't you an old friend?"

She glanced up at him as he sat at the wheel beside her, and the look in his eyes made her turn her own away. She knew that look; she had seen it often in men's eyes, in Michael's, in Boylston's, in John's, in George's.

"I'd better stop this short off," she reflected; "I'm a married woman now."

But she did nothing immediate about ending it. She kept putting off a definite break until "the next time." She could not quite bring herself to the point of dismissing him, he was so eager, so bent on entertaining her, and she had nothing else to do in the afternoons. His obvious infatuation drew her. She could not help it. To watch his fair skin turn pink and his blue eyes grow dark when she looked at him steadily for a moment, amused and, in an odd way, thrilled her. It was pleasant to have him like her; she did not stop to analyze in just what way he did. He had a "case" on her, that was all. Nor did her conscience trouble her particularly because she did not take George wholly into her confidence every time she was in the company of this old friend of her girlhood. When she thought about it at all, she frowned a little. She did not like deceiving George, but there was no other way. If she told him, he would be certain to attach far too much importance to the frequency of their meetings, and there was nothing in them any way! Gerry wanted to amuse her, to be with her, nothing more. Occasionally she could manage to lunch with him. On such days it was with some old friend that she told her husband she had the engagement. It seemed easier to invent an excuse, than to explain matters.

§ 4

"Oh, Zelda, Zelda, I'm mad about you, honey. I think of nothing else these days but just you."

"Stop it, Gerry. Don't be silly. I'm a perfectly happy married woman and I adore my husband."

"Yes, you do,"—incredulously.

"Yes, I do,"—assertively.

"He doesn't give a damn about you. As far as I can see, he's never with you, never takes you any place, hangs round the Emeryville track all the time."

"Perhaps, but he's doing that as much for me as for himself. He's going to take me to Europe this summer."

"I've got a photograph of him taking you to Europe!"

"Well, that's what we're planning to do; we're going to Spain."

"Zelda, do you know I've a hundred thousand in my own right?"

"What of it?"

"Well, I could take care of you, and set you up——"

"*Gerry!* Are you proposing I leave George and live with you?" It truly surprised her.

"I—I didn't mean to put it as rawly as that."

"Well, you've certainly got your nerve with you! What right have you to say a thing like that to me?"

"I didn't think it out, Zelda. I was just thinking that I'd love to take care of you and buy you everything you wanted and that if I were your husband I would. . . . I would . . ."

"Punch the head of anybody who made such an improper proposal to your wife," she retorted.

"No-no; forget I said that. I really didn't mean it. I was just thinking about your husband——"

"You'd better not worry about George. He's twice your size."

"Oh, don't talk vulgarly. I'm not trying to steal you away from him. It occurred to me that he doesn't treat

you very courteously—attentively, let's say,—not the way I'd treat a woman as glorious as you by any means. I'll be hanged if I see what companionship you get out of living with him. He's never with you."

"That's my business."

"Well, listen, honey, forget what I said, and tell me you're not angry with me for loving you."

She eyed him appraisingly for a full minute.

"You don't love me honestly, Gerry; that's the trouble," she said, thinking aloud.

"You're wrong. I do. I love you better than any girl I've ever known in all this world,—I love you better than my father or mother or any friend I've got,—I love you better——"

"Hush-hush! I hate heroics."

"But I *do* love you, Zelda. I'll give you anything you want, *anything,* you understand, if only you'll be just a little nice to me."

The next time he took her to lunch he brought a plush case from his pocket, opened it, took out a beautiful diamond and emerald bracelet which he tried to fasten about her wrist. She jerked her hand away.

"What's the idea, Gerry?" There was impatience and anger in her voice. "Are you trying to *buy* my favor? Are you trying to seduce me in the good old-fashioned way? Really, Gerry, I—I'm surprised at you. I don't want your old bracelet, I don't want presents from you, and I don't want *you* any more! You can just leave me out of your calculations from now on; I never want to see you again."

The following morning brought a large square box and a great bunch of white violets with his card "Forgive me! I'm an utter fool!" The flowers came while George was in the room.

"Who's sending you those?" he asked.

She told him readily. All right to be frank about Gerry now that she was done with him; she really did not want to see him again. He *was* a fool, and he had

made a fool mistake; he had an altogether wrong opinion of her.

"He's been seeing me off and on," she told her husband, "and I guess he had a 'case.' He used to be kind of mushy about me when I was a kid; we had a boy and girl affair. He's becoming kind of a nuisance; I'm going to tie a can to him."

She tore up Gerry's card, tossed the scraps out of the window, and put the violets in the basin in the bathroom. Her words carried conviction; she meant them at the moment. But that afternoon when George left her, and she was called to the telephone, she answered it and half an hour later was waiting for Gerry when he called for her.

§ 5

Rodoni's nestled in a grove of oaks, the walls and sides of its eating pavilion were covered with vines, a stream chuckled over smooth round stones and pebbles, flowing just beneath the screened unglassed windows of the pavilion, and these looked out upon more trees, upon distant roof tops, and finally upon the sides of the purple mountain that heaved itself like a great-shouldered tired lion just beyond. The resort was situated across the Bay from San Francisco and was reached first by ferry, then by train, and then by a crooked road, rocky, rutted and dusty, which led from the scarred and initial-carved depot, where the train stopped on signal, to the beguiling oasis of oak trees, vines, geranium beds and patches of ragged lawn that was Rodoni's. As a girl, Zelda had heard of the place. One obtained excellently cooked chicken there, *ravioli, tallerini* and *gnucci,* while Rodoni's cellar was reputed to be exceptional. Gerry had sung its praises to her almost from their first meeting and had begged her to let him take her there.

"It's an entrancing spot, Zelda," he urged; "you'll

love it, and we'll have a glorious time. I want to drive you in the car, and I'll get away from the office any day you can go. The food you'll remember as long as you live, and it's such a delightful trip, and the place itself so lovely! I'm surprised you've never been there."

He harped upon the expedition, and she would have readily consented to it, had it not been for having to give George a reason for an early departure. Gerry wanted to take a mid-morning boat in order to arrive in time for lunch. She had offered one excuse after another, dismissing the plan in her own mind as too difficult and too much of a bother to carry out, until a certain day when George specially offended her.

She had spent the afternoon with Gerry, first at the Orpheum, and then in a quick run to the Beach in his car, and there had enjoyed an unusually happy hour at the Cliff House. At the very moment when above everything else in the world she had not wanted to go home, and Gerry had been imploring her to remain and dine with him, she had felt obliged to silence his pleas and return to the Golden West in order to be with her husband during what she had known would be neither an agreeable nor a companionable meal. But, after putting this dutiful program into effect, and after setting Gerry adrift, George had failed to appear.

He had gone to the track as usual that morning, and Zelda had refused to lunch with Gerry in order that she might share the meal with him. Between five-thirty and six o'clock, he customarily returned, but on this occasion, although late herself, she had found him still not home when she reached their room. Seven, eight o'clock had come and gone. Zelda, bored and idle, had ordered soup and tea for herself, milk for the cat, and she and Queenie had kept each other lonely company. Buster no longer stayed in the diminutive bedroom; he had been put in charge of the furnace man in the dingy but extensive basement of the hotel, where he spent the greater portion of his time, grew black with dirt and

coal dust, but had room enough to run about and be happy.

As the clock neared eleven, Zelda undressed and had been upon the point of bed, when she heard the sound of stumbling in the corridor. Instantly she knew its meaning and flung the door wide. A bellboy and the elevator attendant had George's limp big body between them, and half dragged, half lifted him down the hall, through the narrow doorway, and dumped him like a sack of meal upon the bed. His hat had disappeared, his cheek and chin were streaked, his clothes were torn and dirty. Disgusted and repelled, she washed his face, tugged at his garments, rolling him from side to side to free them from his weight and, after a struggle, managed to undress him. Leaving him in his undershirt, she covered him with the bedclothes, and spent the night on the floor. In the morning the room smelled foully, and George awakened to violent retching which brought him no relief. No single word passed between them. George had staggered to the bath room and staggered back again, tumbling, sick and wretched upon the bed, where he immediately slept again, filling the room with guttural, distressed breathing. Zelda endured it as long as she was able, then suddenly began to make up her face, dress with care, and looking her radiant self, she presently descended to the hotel lobby and telephoned Page, Godfrey & Co.

Could Gerry manage to get away from the office? . . . Indeed, he could. . . . Did he want to come and take her out to the Beach, or any place, she didn't care where, just so long as it was out of the city, and he would amuse her; she had a headache and was sick of streets and buildings and people; she was blue and wanted to be cheered up. . . . Why, of course, he'd meet her in fifteen minutes. Wouldn't this be just the day for Rodoni's? They could catch the twelve o'clock Sausalito ferry. . . .

Two hours later they were running along the tree-

bordered, dusty roads of Marin County with the smell of tar weed and burnt stubble scenting the air, jays hoarsely and sleepily calling to one another, and hot, hazy sunshine bathing the countryside in warm caressing breaths.

"Oh," said Zelda on a deep sigh of pain and longing, "I love it over here. I want to come and die in this place. When I'm old and done with this world I'd like one of those shingled cabins up on the sides of Tamalpais with just a patch of garden to fuss over and perhaps a dog like Buster to keep me company."

She gave a distressed thought to the animal wondering, as she spoke, what had become of him. While she had waited for Gerry, she had descended to the hotel basement with the idea that if Buster was half-way clean she would take him with her on this jaunt to the country, but neither the furnace man, nor any of the mysterious grimy individuals who roamed these regions had been able to find him.

"You can have your cabin and your garden now, if you like," Gerry told her with an easy smile, glancing at her as she sat beside him.

"Please don't talk like that," she said with knitted brows. "You spoil a nice day with that sort of conversation. . . . I don't like it, and you know it."

"Sorry," he said, penitently. "I'm crazy about you and I'd make you a present of the world if you'd let me."

"I'll accept no favors nor give any," she stated. After a moment's silence she went on with increased feeling. "You know, if I let myself think of what you mean by things like that, I'd make you stop your car and I'd get out and walk to the nearest station and never see you again." And after an interval, with a shrug and a long breath: "Oh, I don't want to feel cross with you, Gerry; I'm too utterly wretched and worn out to do anything to-day but enjoy myself."

"What's the trouble? What's gone wrong?"

But she could not speak of George. Her husband and his delinquencies were her affair.

Rodoni's was deserted. A waiter hurried out to meet them as the car wheeled into the enclosure and Gerry brought it to a standstill beneath the low python limbs of a great oak. Languishing hydrangeas with here and there a lavender blossom, edged the shady side of the yard, and opposite, along the base of the pavilion, geraniums made a royal band of turkey red. There was a sleepy hum of bees among the flowers, and in the dry dust of the roadbed, a stray hen, fluffing her feathers, made a bed for herself. It was warm, still, fragrant.

The dining pavilion was divided into a series of cubicles, each containing a table to hold six persons and a requisite number of straight-backed chairs; the walls were plain wooden partitions, the entrance curtained and the opposite side screened with wire and open to the four winds of heaven. This gave upon a lovely stretch of wooded country ending at the base of the mountain, swimming in shimmering heat. There was something hypnotic in the contemplation of this vista of trees and half-hidden roofs and purple uplands. Zelda sat with her chin resting upon the heel of her palm, her elbow on the table, drinking in the view while the waiter circled about them, arranging napkins, cutlery and dishes, and after consultation with Gerry departed to order the lunch. The hour was one of gracious beauty; peace and tranquillity lay about them and upon the landscape; Zelda's senses became soothed in luxurious contentment. Cocktails appeared, then food ingeniously disguised, invitingly garnished, mysteriously savored, and lastly the wine, soft, insidious, delicious. A languor lulled the girl's mind and body. She thought no more of George, his selfishness, his waywardness, their precarious existence; she thought no more of life nor herself, nor even of her whereabouts or her companion. She was content to sit dreaming of nothing, cheek on palm, gazing at purple Tamalpais, raising her

wineglass to her lips for tiny sips, filling her lungs, now and then, with deep, long, soul-satisfying breaths from her cigarette, listening to Gerry murmuring, murmuring, murmuring. She gave small heed to his words; it was hardly more than the sound of his voice she heard. Again and again he would ask:

"Isn't this a sweet place, honey? Isn't this unbelievably beautiful? The food delicious?"

And to all of this, she would answer without thinking:

"Wonderful."

After a time she found him next to her on her side of the table, his arms about her, his lips finding her own. She let him take off her hat and gather her closer to him; she liked the contact of his clean young skin, his face against hers, his trembling eager kisses. A soft beguiling sensuous current flowed through her limbs; she felt herself floating, drifting, floating, drifting. . . . It was warm, it was still, the sun breathed upon the earth, the air hung heavy with summer fragrance, bees hummed, it was very warm.

With an effort she wrenched herself from his arms, and sat up, drawing a long breath.

"This can't go on, Gerry. We got to stop. . . . It's been a glorious day; let's not spoil it." She reached for a glass of water, drained it, and wet her palms with a moistened napkin.

He pleaded earnestly, his words almost inarticulate; he tried to hold her, to take her in his arms once more, but Zelda had had enough, and had herself in hand.

"Zelda, Zelda! I love you, honey, I love you. Don't be mean, don't be cruel. I worship the ground beneath your feet. I'd eat dirt for you, Zelda. Oh, Zelda honey, don't go away from me! You're glorious. There never was a woman in the world like you! . . . *Zelda!*"

"Stop it, Gerry. Do you want me to begin to dislike you? I've got to go home now. . . ."

There came a sharp vision of the home that awaited

her: the disordered room, the big inert figure on the bed.

"Oh, Zelda, you can't go now, you can't leave me now! Why do you want to end such a wonderful, such a day of ecstasy as this?"

"Don't be a fool, Gerry. You know what lies at the end of this road."

"I know, I know; but why not, why not? I love you, you love me."

"We'd both regret it."

"Never."

"Well, *I* should."

"But why? What harm? Who would know?"

More entreaties, more supplications, more pleas for mercy.

Zelda, on her feet, stood between his knees, his arms about her waist. She pushed back the ripples of his light hair, gazed into his blue, beseeching eyes, noted the tiny bubbles in the corners of his mouth, and considered him. She could entangle this young man if she were so minded; she could entwine herself into his life and win to such a hold that he could never shake her free, and that hundred thousand which was his in is own right, as well as a share in his father's millions, would be hers; she could have a home of her own out of it, a six-room redwood cabin on the slopes of Tamalpais, and a patch of garden and Buster, everything she wanted; or, if she decided to try the stage again, he would back her in whatever venture she might choose. Not because his fancy for her would endure, but because she knew she could compromise him in his social world, make him marry her once George was out of the way. Many California women had gained their husbands and their wealth by just such methods in times gone by, and were received to-day in San Francisco society. She had heard Uncle Caleb and her aunt discuss them; everybody discussed them. Security for the rest of her days she could win here and now, if she said the word; an end to

trouble, an end to foreboding, an end to worry. She leaned forward and kissed his forehead with a brief, unimpassioned pressure of her lips, pushed herself free from his clasp, gathered up hat, purse and gloves.

"I'm going to the dressing room to fix up, Gerry, and when I come back we must get started."

"Zelda, Zelda! You're brutal, you're selfish, you're *mean!*"

"Not as mean as I might be," she said lightly, departing.

§ 6

He drove her to the door of her hotel, stopped at the curb, and for a few moments more, held her with quick speech and shining, eager eyes.

"When am I going to see you again, honey? To-morrow? Make it to-morrow afternoon. Oh, honey, please say yes. I have a new place I want to take you to, and you'll love it. It's up on Telegraph Hill, the quaintest old place, an Italian villa such as you see at Amalfi and Sorrento, with a balcony where we'll have Angelica and grapes! Say to-morrow. I'll 'phone you at one, a little after, and if you're not there then, I'll call fifteen minutes later. Oh, Zelda honey, I think I'm the happiest man in the world, the happiest and the most *un*happy! You're just beginning to care for me, and I'll make you love me honest and truly yet. You see if I don't. Oh, you *will,* you've *got* to! Do you know, you darling, you're the most beautiful, the most seductive woman God ever created?"

"Gerry, you're cracked, you're daffy! . . . I must get out."

"To-morrow? To-morrow at one?"

"Well, I can't say. I'm afraid about to-morrow. Maybe when I wake up to-morrow I'll decide I must never see you again!"

"Don't say things like that, when you know you don't mean them!"

"I *might* mean this."

"Sssssh! Hush! I won't listen! I'll 'phone at one."

"Good-bye; it's been a heavenly day."

"I wish I could kiss you."

"Well, you can't, right here on Ellis Street. I must go in, now. George may come along any minute and catch us sitting here in the car. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, dearest woman. I love you! I *adore* you!"

She climbed from the automobile, waved at him, and entered the hotel. As the shadow of its door fell upon her, the shadow of responsibility and fact fell upon her as well. George upstairs, still sick perhaps, or had he managed to get himself over to the track? Distaste welling up, the prospect of boredom, another night of stupid dreariness with nothing to do. A fleeting recollection of the day: Gerry, fair-haired, blue-eyed, a weak face when you came to consider it, hot, pleading, trembling. This mustn't go on: there must be an end; no more of Gerry Page; George must get her out. . . .

Her thoughts tripped one upon another as she ascended in the tarnished gilt elevator cage. The door of her room was locked, and she could not get her key into the keyhole. She poked and fumbled. Directly she realized there was another key inserted from the other side. George asleep probably. She rapped smartly and began softly to call his name. Suddenly a sharp fear clutched at her heart. She sniffed for gas, then rang the elevator bell furiously.

An interval of maddening delay when no one seemed to understand the meaning of hurry. More moments of exquisite suspense while the mechanic, summoned from the basement, poked through the keyhole with a wire. Kelly, the house detective, and O'Shaughnessy, the assistant desk clerk, stood on either side of her as she straightened her back against the wall, her two hands clenched into fists. A tinkle, a tiny thump on the floor within, a quick fitting of the lock with Zelda's key and

the door swung open. She could see the figure on the bed before O'Shaughnessy raised the window curtain. George, his shabby brocade dressing gown about him, his head flung back, his hair wild, his face chalk white, so still, so calm! Kelly bent over the bed.

"He's breathing all right."

Kelly tried to rouse him and as he did so, his foot kicked a bottle upon the floor.

"Hello," he said; he looked down and picked it up. The small bold-faced letters upon it were clearly readable: PAREGORIC.

"Humph. . . . Don't think he's gone yet. May be a chance. Get Doctor Thompson,—*quick!*"

A confused running back and forth now. Other doors along the hallway opened, dishevelled women peered out and stole forth in their wrappers, filling the hall. Kelly shut the door. The physician appeared, a long, black bag in his hand.

A swift glance at the label with the tale its black lettering told, and then the eyelids of the senseless figure on the bed pushed back, the eyeballs scrutinized.

"Suppose he took it all?"

Ear to bared chest, finger on pulse.

"Not dead yet; can't tell a thing here. We'll hustle him over to the Emergency and find out. . . . You his wife? Well, there's a chance, lady; we'll see what we can do for him over at the Emergency. You'll want to come along."

"Here's a letter, Mrs. Selby. Guess it's from him. Found it here right on the bureau."

"Clear the hall out there. What're all those people rubbering for! . . . And pull that shade there, will you, Mike?"

"Better save that bottle. Coroner may want to see it."

"Can I do anything, Mrs. Selby? Want some whiskey? . . . Look here, Thompson; Mrs. Selby——"

"No-no; I'm all right," Zelda said straightening her

shoulders. "Don't worry about me. . . . Can't—can't they *hurry?*"

§ 7

The hack bearing her and the physician followed the ambulance. Stony-eyed, her small teeth clenched together, she watched them bundle George's unconscious figure on to the stretcher and bear him away. Diagonally, from corner to corner across the elevator, they set it down, the gate closed with a click and clang, and the car sunk from sight carrying its freight to the basement of bins, storerooms and mysterious dark passages in one swift, quiet, unobtrusive descent. Thus were the bodies of suicides and the dead hustled out of the way, Zelda's subconscious mind noted. As the elevator disappeared, a woman's shrill, intoxicated laugh rang out from behind a closed door. Gay revel there, thought Zelda, wine and a woman sitting on a man's knee!

The waiting room of the Emergency Hospital was devoid of furniture except for a gray iron stove set squarely in its centre. On two sides, fixed to the walls, ranged benches of polished oak, their slats fitting closely together, curved to fit the contours of the human figure. There were two doors and a window. Doctor Thompson left her here and disappeared into some inner region. In the bumping, rattling vehicle, he had talked to her encouragingly; half the time these cases weren't fatal, particularly if they were discovered in time. Paregoric was a mighty dangerous drug all right, camphorated tincture of opium, and four ounces was enough to kill any man, but her husband was a big fellow and he was pretty certain it hadn't been inside of him very long. But his words had made no impression upon her. She heard him as though from a great distance and what he said had seemed not to pertain to her at all. With her hands tightly clasped, her lips bit together by her teeth, she had sat beside him, stiff and upright, thinking over and over: "He must not die now, he must not die now,

not until I have—not until I have. . . ." She got no further either with the sentence or the thought, but it was Gerry and her conduct which troubled her. She must right herself before they took George from her; she must undo a wrong, she must rectify a mistake; she hadn't been. . . . Who was it that had called her once a "square shooter"? . . . Oh, thoughts, thoughts, they were driving her crazy; George couldn't, *mustn't* die now!

But in the half-lit, dismal, empty anteroom of the hospital, while she sat upon the hard varnished bench alone, apparently forgotten, devouring thoughts fell upon her helpless soul like hungry wolves.

White of face she sat, her clasped hands between her knees, bent forward, staring at the dusty floor beside the gray iron stove. . . . He mustn't die, he mustn't die, until she had,—until she had . . . God! How long they were! Didn't they know that she was here? His wife? Had they forgotten all about her? Did they want both of them dead on their hands, husband *and* wife? The suspense was killing her. . . . Why had he done it? What reason? She remembered that other time in Saint Louis. A morbid mind, his. Always a mad impulse in the midst of depression. Had he any suspicion of her and Gerry? Had he known all along and had that been the reason for his wish to destroy himself? . . . "Oh, George, George, you *must* get well, you've *got to* get well, to give me a chance to make it up to you!"

A drinker, a gambler, a waster, a boisterous, parading, second-rate actor, these he might be, but now she thought of him as she loved to think of him: a little boy, a naughty, impulsive boy at heart, tender, generous, affectionate, whom she could manage and make behave through love if she exerted herself,—and a wave of yearning welled up in her, choking her, blinding her. She raised her linked fingers to her lips and with the gesture a stiff corner of the crushed letter in her hand, brought it to mind. On the crumpled envelope: "To

my wife." She thrust a finger beneath the flap and burst it open; then beneath the wavering gas jet in its milk-white globe, she stood and read:

My dear, dear girl:

I've tried to write you coherently, but I can't. I've torn up three attempts. What's the use of self-analysis and explanations? They are no good. There is nothing left for me to live for. I've thought it all out. There's really nothing. I tried to make something off the ponies so that you and I might go away together and have that holiday in Spain. I really hoped for that. I meant it, Zelda, I swear to God, I did. Well, I failed. They cleaned me out. You predicted they would. I leave you nothing but a memory of my own weak, rotten nature. I'm sorry, dear girl, truly sorry. I wish to God I had never persuaded you to marry me. You'd been better off—and happier. I dragged you down and brought you only shame and a lot of trouble. This seems to me the best way. It sets you free. It opens the cage. Oh, Zelda, my own dear wife, my eyes are streaming tears as I pen these words of farewell. You are the best, the *finest* woman that ever crossed my path. You were far, far too good for me!

How sorry I am to have to tell you that you will find Buster gone! I sold him to make a last bet. Had a sure tip. You always have, you know. I can't face you and tell you about it. I know how you loved him. No use going on. I'm busted, in debt. I'm only a dead weight around your neck.

Make up to some rich fellow and marry him, and when you do, pick him better than you picked the first time. You can't do so badly again! I'm a rotten failure. I made a hash out of life, and if anything could have saved me it would have been you, but even you couldn't accomplish the impossible. I threw your love, and your faith in me and your respect and esteem and even your friendship all away! I'm not worth a tinker's dam—so *Exit Selby!*

If I only had you here to take you in my arms just once again!

Good-bye. You know I've always loved you.

George.

P. S. If Matilda Petersen of Lincoln, Nebr., is still living, she's my sister.

The tears came now, round crystal drops cascading down her face, dropping unheeded from cheek to breast, her lips quivering despite the hard, hurting pressure of her teeth, her throat closing in spasms of pain that stopped her breath. She sank to a sitting posture upon the bench beneath the wavering gaslight, the letter crushed in her hand.

"Oh, he *must not* die—he *must not* die,—*must not,* —*must not.*"

Suddenly an explosion of violent sobbing burst from her, sending her forehead forward upon the knuckles of her locked fingers, racking her, rending her.

The door opened. A man there in a white coat, a man she had never seen before.

"It's all right, lady, he's coming round. All we got to do now is to keep him awake."

Her grief checked a moment, tore loose again, rising to a shrill squeak as she toppled sideways upon the hard bench.

§ 8

Doctor Thompson beside her explaining.

". . . Would have killed most men . . . four ounces, you know. They've washed out his stomach, injected caffeine, and they've made him drink a lot of strong coffee. He's groggy, wants to sleep, but they'll keep him awake. . . . Close call . . . never saw a man nearer passing out. . . . Hope he's learned his lesson."

Toward eleven o'clock they permitted her to see him. The spectacle he presented was ludicrous had it not been so tragic and pathetic. His long hair was in a wild tangle, his face ghastly white, and his eyes black in their hollow sockets like black coins stuck there. Harrowing and piteous enough, but upon him they had put a coarse hospital nightgown opened up the back, below which appeared his hairy shanks, and his feet thrust into canvas slippers. An attendant sat watching him, a towel

with a wet end in his hand, and Zelda saw with a shudder of horror that his purpose was to keep George awake with it. Up and down the corridor they kept him moving, no respite, no moment's peace, no second's closing of the eyes.

He gazed at her with a wild look as she came toward him, but he saw neither her outstretched arms nor the love that shone through her swimming eyes. His own roved from her, swept the room, came back to her, and he wet his lips like a harassed animal.

"Gee," he said from a hard, dry throat, "this is pretty fierce. They won't let you alone for an instant."

In the early morning she took him home. The clerk behind the hotel desk, and one or two bellboys stared curiously at them as they made their way across the lobby and entered the tarnished elevator cage which had lowered George a few hours before, prostrate, unconscious, all but dead.

§ 9

"We'll begin all over again," said Zelda; "you didn't know it but I've got some money."

"How? What do you mean?"

"Well, I've been hooking it, hooking it the way I did up north. You've been leaving your money 'round and I've been helping myself, now and then. Never spent any; saved it all. Knew you'd need it when the crash came."

"Zelda!"

"Now, what I want to know, first, is how much did you get for Buster?"

"Twenty-five."

"But the man agreed to sell him back to you for thirty? Is that right?"

"Yes, he gave me his sacred word. He said of course he couldn't keep him indefinitely, but if I came back right away——"

"Yes-yes, I understand that. Now what else do you owe?"

"Well, it isn't so awful much, but you see *I* didn't see where it was coming from."

"How much *is* it? Let's get paper and pencil, and figure. Now, who've you borrowed from?"

"Ed Bohlmann. You know that chap who's playing with Anita Usher? I met him out in front of the Orpheum, gave him a hard luck story, and he lent me twenty-five."

She wrote it down.

"Who else?"

"'Chip' Silva."

"Don't know him, but what'd he lend you?"

"Guess about twenty."

"Anybody else?"

"Charley Tannebaum."

"How much did you borrow from him?"

"Oh, I didn't borrow anything from him, but I owe him all right. 'Bout a tenner."

"Who else? I want you to think of *everybody.*"

"Well, there's Vrahos. A five spot."

"Anything else?"

"Hotel here. Must be couple weeks behind. They'd notified me, you know. We'd've had to be out of here by Saturday night."

"Well, I've got money enough; don't worry about that. I'll write it down forty, let's make it fifty to be sure. What else?"

"Levy 'round the corner, you know, the pawn-shop. I hocked my overcoat an' my watch an' a pair of cuff links."

"How much?"

"Eighteen. He wouldn't make it twenty."

"Is that all?"

"Far as I can remember."

"Well, we'll add twenty-five to cover what you've forgotten,—and *that's all.* Now, let's see what that

comes to." She made a calculation. "One eighty-five. It's funny," she went on, pencil tapping lip, "I think I've got just two hundred dollars saved up. I'll have to go down to the bank and see. Oh yes, I had to start a bank account. I was afraid you'd find it if I hid it 'round the room, you old incorrigible!

"Now, George, we're going to begin with first principles. No more gambling, no more drinking. We'll go 'round and eat crow with Jakey Cohen and make him take us on again; we'll go wherever he sends us and we'll save our money. It will give us three meals a day and pay room rent and we must be satisfied until something comes along. And listen here, George, we quit the Golden West, understand?"

"Anything, anything, Zelda kid. You're the most wonderful woman in the world. I'll do anything you say. I'll go to hell for you."

"Well, you were on the road there quite by yourself!"

"Don't, Zel', not even in a joke."

He caught her hand, kissed it and pressed it to his cheek.

"Stop that, and listen to what I'm saying. There's a Mrs. Katherine Cassidy,—'Cassy,' we always called her,—who's been wardrobe woman at the Alcazar for twenty years. I lived with her once. She's got a dismal old house two blocks above here and we can get a room there for three dollars a week. We move there tomorrow. We must get down to bed rock, save every cent we can, and get out of Frisco."

"Oh, you betchoo. We *got* to do that. We're cooked if we stay here. If I could once get back to New York where I'm known, I could go straight into Charley Frohman's office, or Belasco's, or Marc Klaw's, where everybody'd know me——"

"Now, just cut that, George. I'm going to take you in hand and you're going to be a humble, unassertive, modest little boy, and do just as mama says. Frohman,

Belasco, and Marc Klaw never heard of you nor of anything you ever did."

"But——" he began, his cheeks swelling in his old blustering fashion. She silenced him.

"All right," he said, "I won't. I'm going to do just as you say. I made a fool of myself, I'm a rotter, a no-account, a failure; I've had my fling at trying to run myself, and I'm no good; guess I can afford to let you try your hand. I'll do just as you say. . . . Only . . ."

"'Only' what?"

"If you'd made 'em leave me alone, you'd've been better off."

"George!"

"I'm sorry! I'm a fool! . . . Ah, Zelda kid, you're a perfect wonder."

She left him shaving and making himself presentable against a visit to Jake Cohen's Amusement Bureau. After the effects of the drug had worn off, he had had a night's rest and was more like his old self again. A disagreeable business was before her, but she had prepared herself. It had to be done. She had thought it all out. There was no other way.

She stepped into the telephone booth in the lobby and called Page, Godfrey & Co.

"Hello, Gerry, I'm free. He has just gone to get the boat. Sorry about yesterday, but he was sick and stayed home. I *had* to be with him. Oh, Gerry, I'm so unhappy. I'm sick of it all. I want to see you. Guess I'm only happy when I'm with you. Thought maybe you could fix it this aft' so you could come and get me and cheer me up. The other day you spoke of that Italian place, that villa, up on Telegraph Hill. Couldn't we go there this afternoon? . . . Will you? You *are* a darling, but you never fail me. . . . What's that? Oh, Rodoni's; yes, it was wonderful. Well, I missed you too yesterday. And say, Gerry dear, don't call for me at the hotel. I'll meet you . . . at Maskey's on Kearny."

The sun shone a white silver disk through the gray curtain of fog. The bay was checkered with flecks of foam and masts of small boats close to shore bobbed and teetered in the fast in-rolling wave rips. Out in the stream, a red-hulled freighter was dipping her nose into the spume and heading for the milky bank that rolled in through the Heads to receive her. A white vaporous arm stretched over a shoulder of Tamalpais and a tenuous lacy scarf trailed through the pine groves of the Presidio. The little island of Alcatraz, like a small and sturdy Gibraltar, set its face squarely against the advancing billows of mist.

"Doesn't it look exactly like an invading army?" Zelda said, her elbows on the rail of the pepper-hung balcony where they had been sipping Angelica and nibbling nut cakes. "There's something so mysteriously soft and lovely about the fog. It's utterly beautiful."

"Not as utterly beautiful as you," Gerry told her, leaning beside her, an arm about her waist.

"It's heavenly up here. How do you ever find such places?"

The house was built against the steep bank of the hill where it fell precipitously down to a jumble of roofs, warehouses, wharves and shipping. The top floor was on a level with the rockstrewn, unpaved street; the second and third floors were reached by a zig-zagging stairway along the façade of the building. Part inn, part restaurant, the place was patronized by Italians who lived in the neighborhood, and it possessed an old-world enchanting quaintness. The tiny bedroom in which the wine and cakes had been served, gave directly upon the balcony, the connecting window framed by looped lace curtains, and the little chamber was crowded with old furniture of peasant workmanship, with holy pictures and statues of the Blessed Virgin, with drapes, bric-à-brac, dried grasses, and had a friendly, homelike atmosphere. Carlotta, whose old face was brown and wrinkled like a walnut shell, had

brought them their refreshments here, but Zelda and Gerry had moved them to the balcony.

"It's nice to have you like it," he said to her; "I hoped it would strike you the way it does me."

"What a view! You can see clear across the Bay to where we were day before yesterday."

"Day before yesterday! I shall never forget our day at Rodoni's."

"What about to-day?"

"Ah, Zelda!"

"Have you been thinking of me?"

"How can you ask! You've been haunting my thoughts every minute, day and night. I can't get away from thinking of you."

She looked up at him and let her eyelids slowly close as he took her in his arms. His lips found her cheek, a corner of her mouth.

"Zelda," he breathed; "you—you are enchanting. I love you, Zelda, I worship you. . . ."

"Do you?"

"You *know* I do. . . . Honey, I can't live without you. I got to have you, Zelda,—I got to—got to—got to,—y'understand, I just *got* to."

"Listen, Gerry; I have something to ask you."

"I just *got* to, y'understand."

"Please listen, Gerry, before you say anything more. You want me to be nice to you, don't you?"

"Ah, dearest!"

"Well, I'm considering it, but I want you to do me a favor. You know, you've sometimes tried to make me presents, give me things. . . ."

"Yes, I know."

"And I've always refused?"

"You've always refused."

"Well, now, I—I want to get some new clothes. I'm tired to death of what I have, and I want something new. Summer's coming, and I haven't a thing to wear."

"And what do you want me to do? Give you something pretty?"

"I need some money, Gerry."

"Darling!"

"I thought maybe you'd be willing——"

"Honey, how much do you want?"

"I don't know whether you'll think it big or little . . . I need a couple of hundred."

"S'at all? Oh, Zelda, you're funny! I'll give you ten times that if you say the word."

"No, that's all I want. Just two hundred. I saw something down town that I'm just crazy about; I don't think I ever wanted anything quite so much."

"My child! You know how eager I've been to do something for you. . . . Here, I'll make you out a check this minute."

He whipped out his fountain pen and took a folded blank check from his pocketbook. With the pen poised he turned to her:

"Let me make it out for five hundred."

"No-no, I won't take it."

"*Three* hundred."

"No, Gerry, I need two, and I don't want a cent more."

She watched him write the figure, scribble his name, then took the slip of paper in her finger tips and could hardly wait until it was dry to tuck it to safety inside her stocking top.

One more hour's dallying while she must play her part, one more hour's mummery while she must meet smile with smile and give look for look, one more hour's endurance while she must submit to his hot kisses and embraces. He needed to be circumvented, deluded and eluded, cajoled with promises this one last time, and she had but to win to the street and freedom with the slip of stiff paper inside her stocking, to be done with this gay libertine forever.

She hated herself as he held her in his arms, she hated herself when she lifted her eyes to his, she hated herself when she pretended she would soon consent to all he asked.

"Good-bye, Gerry, good-bye, dear. Thanks for the check. See you to-morrow, yes, surely to-morrow. We'll lunch together and spend the afternoon. . . . Maybe dinner next week. . . . Good-bye."

She watched the big car lose itself in the traffic, made sure that it was gone, then turned with a swelling heart and quick step toward her hotel. There she cashed the check, settled George's account, left the balance of the money, with the exception of a fifty dollar bill in the hotel's safe, and with the folded note tucked into her glove, set forth again in the direction of a shop whose address she had written down in her memory the moment she had heard it.

§ 10

"My baby, my baby, did they try to take you from me? Did they try to take my best friend from me? And did you miss me and think I was never coming to get you? Oh, Buster, Buster, I just couldn't live without you, I'm afraid, I just couldn't get along. I came after you as fast as I could; I had to wait until this afternoon to get the money. I didn't know where you were until yesterday. He never told me, you know; and you mustn't be mad at him for selling you. He had to have the money and he made the man promise to give you back. I've been a bad, bad mistress, Buster. I've been too lazy to get up and look after you in the mornings, and I let those dirty men downstairs take care of you, kick you 'round and neglect you. But nobody shall ever have you again, doggie-mine. I'll wash you and pet you and feed you up until you're nice and fat again, and you and I'll take long walks together, and I'll

never leave you again,—never,—never,—never! Oh, Buster, forgive me, won't you, please?" The bright head went down upon his back, her arms about him.

And suddenly the dog barked, a quick, sharp, troubled bark, and Zelda caught him to her, hugging him fiercely, and kissing his stiff, white, dirty hair at the back of his neck, kissing it again and again.

CHAPTER VIII

§ 1

The room at Mrs. Cassidy's was like the old woman herself,—ancient, shabby, sinister and decayed; it was also gloomy and dark. Battered, rickety furniture filled it, a double high-backed walnut bed, ornamented with scrolls and knobs and curlicues, a wobbly, clumsy set of drawers, a sewing machine, an oval, marble-topped table, the marble cracked, and various unrelated chairs. The carpet was worn clean to the woof in many places and ground with dirt and dust. Soiled lace curtains hung limply beside the tall windows and these looked out upon a region given over to coils of wire, ill-assorted bottles, and a pile of broken grocery boxes. No ray of sunshine penetrated here by reason of a high brick wall, the side of a Fire Engine House, next door.

Zelda, however, could do as she pleased at Cassy's, and although she had no running water in the room, she bought a kerosene burner, pots and pans, a few dishes, and made preparations to cook most of George's and her own meals herself. Almost overnight, life seemed to take on new interest. The prospect of the days to come was neither alarming nor displeasing. George, in his humble, chastened mood, was again the reformed George of the days that marked the latter part of the Meserve engagement. Once more he became a gentle, amusing companion with whom it was a pleasure to live, and whom she delighted to advise and direct. She thoroughly enjoyed her rôle of manager, enjoyed planning the day and the future, enjoyed thinking out details, taking charge of the money, doling it out, saving

here and there, wherever she could. George, obedient, tractable, eager to win her approval, was a George she had almost forgotten had ever existed; his gratitude and humility touched her; he knew the kind of nonsense and tomfoolery she liked, and he exerted himself to make her laugh; time and again he would convulse her until helpless tears stood in her eyes. Sometimes when, big, ungainly, he was performing some ridiculous antics in the room, amusing himself as much as attempting to amuse her, she would look at him and think:

"I could love you, *really* love you, if you were always like this."

She did not voice her feelings. There was no need. Their companionship, their intimacy, their constant chatter, her rumpling of his black hair, her sudden, impulsive fondling of his big head, her surrender to his bear hugs, told him more eloquently than anything she could have said, that she approved of him once more.

And always actuating her, consciously and unconsciously, was the thought:

"I said I'd make it up to him, and I will."

§ 2

George made overtures of peace to Jakey Cohen and Zelda concluded it. With the hot days of summer ahead, there was sure to be a large demand from the small towns for entertainers, jugglers, gymnasts, vaudeville acts. It was the time of the year for fairs, local celebrations, three-day festivities. Perhaps the prospect of good business influenced Jakey to renew relationship with Selby and Marsh, but he would never wholly forgive George, Zelda suspected, for the summary way in which he had broken with the bureau in the spring.

With Buster scrubbed and groomed as he had not been for weeks, she called upon Jakey, won his favor by flattering graciousness. She explained frankly their

dire need of employment, and the very first week, Jakey sent them to Salinas for Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, during what was known, in that bustling community, as "Rodeo Week." Zelda had enjoyed being in harness again; more than that, she enjoyed the feeling of earning honest money and her feet being set upon solid ground again.

"If Jakey ever gives us an opportunity to show in Frisco," she said to George one evening during this engagement, when they had walked from the theatre back to the hotel through the warm summer night, and were preparing for bed, "I want you to write Morrison and simply tell him who we are, what we've got, and ask him to come and see us."

"You can save the stamps and stationery," George answered with a discouraging head shake. "This isn't like New York or Chicago; they don't do any booking here. A letter never gets you any place, anyhow. He'd never see it; it would get chucked into the nearest waste-basket by the office boy. . . . What we've got to do is to save the simoleons until we can buy our way back east."

"You ought to try just the same," Zelda persisted.

"Anything you say goes, but Jakey'll never hand us anything less than twenty miles from the Orpheum. Anyhow, Zel', look at that costume of yours; it's all gone to pieces; there isn't a speck of life in it any more. We wouldn't stand a ghost of a show with Morrison."

"If Morrison knows his business, my costume won't make the slightest difference."

"Aaaah,—you don't know."

"Now listen here, George, you used to kick about *my* crabbing. I'm running the show and you quit it. I won't have you gloom about everything I suggest."

"All right, kid; won't say another word. I'll write to the man-in-the-moon if you say so. You're a wonder, Zel'; G-god, you're the most wonderful woman in the world! A week ago, I was through with life, wanted to

be done with it, and now all of a sudden you've made it seem worth while again.

He came to stand beside her at the open window where she leaned with her forehead against a bare forearm. The night was fragrant with summer smells, the smell of distant barns, of horses, cattle, the smell of new-cut alfalfa and of ripening fruit, the smell of rich earth cooling after the heat of the day. The little town twinkled; buggies and surreys stood hitched along the curb; it was Saturday night and the ranch hands were in town making merry. The hotel window looked out upon the main street, strung for this week with banners and pennants, and the saloons and poolrooms belched warm light across the pavements. Now and then came the rasp of the handle of a coin machine, the whirr of the wheel and the occasional ring of the bell when a lucky number won. In the distance, from a dance hall, the throaty notes, drums and clanging cymbals of a mechanical organ could faintly be distinguished; nearer at hand rose the sound of young voices harmonizing, an accordion wheezing an accompaniment:

"Through the sycamores the candle lights are gleaming,
On the banks of the Wabash fa—rrrrr a-waaaaay."

"I don't understand what was the matter with me when I was playing the races," George said reflectively, one arm about his wife; "guess I was kind of crazy, off my nut. I saw things all twisted and crooked. Gee, it's amazing to me, Zel', how I can stand here at this window with you and be so happy and contented, all that fever gone out of my blood as if it had never been there. I never want to see a horse race again as long as I live. But you must remember, Zel', that no matter how cross and disagreeable I was to you all that time, I never stopped loving you for a minute. I had that trip to Spain in the back of my head. I kept thinking, you know, that if I could get just one lucky break, I'd

clean up, pull out, and you and I would go away together. And we will some day. We'll stick it out here this summer, get back east in August or by the first of September when they're casting the new shows, and you and I'll get jobs together in the same company, and we'll save the old simoleons, one at a time, you know, Zel',—that's the way to do it,—and a year from now we'll head for Andalusia. . . ."

She looked up into his face with smiling eyes. It sounded so wonderful even if she did not think it would ever happen.

"Oh, George, if we only could!" There was a happy catch in her voice.

He drew her to him, his arms around her.

"Zelda kid, you and I can do anything we set our minds to."

"I know we can, if you'll just go on being as you are now."

"I will, dearest girl, *indeed* I will. I'll follow my good angel."

"I'll love you then, and love you better than I've *ever* loved you."

"Zelda!"

Closer he drew her, caught her face between the fingers of a large hand, and pressed his lips to hers, and a wave of tenderness and affection for him rose like a tide.

The young voices passed beneath the window, there was a long dying note from the accordion, and the harmony lingered on a sweet blending and faded into silence. A man called out:

"Hello, Scotty!"

An answer, light, airy, joyous:

"Hello, Davy!"

"Hello, Zelda," George breathed.

"Hello, my husband," Zelda whispered back.

§ 3

But if she fancied she was done with Gerry Page, she was mistaken. When she and George left the Golden West she had been careful to give no forwarding address; if there was mail, he or she would call for it, she told the clerk. She had arranged it this way without giving whys or wherefores to her husband. Gerry would seek her, of course. She expected that. And he would write. Her plan had been that when she and George were in some country town, a good distance from San Francisco, she would write him herself, explain that she and her husband were reunited, that the two hundred dollars she had borrowed had helped bring this about, had paid some pressing debts and put them on their feet, and that it would be repaid at the first opportunity. The postmark of another town, she hoped, would discourage Gerry from pursuing her further. At Salinas, she had had no opportunity to write this letter, and she returned to San Francisco with an uneasy feeling that until Jakey sent them out of town again, she ran the risk of an unpleasant encounter.

It rather staggered her to find on the Monday morning when she and George got back to the city, a note from Gerry awaiting her at Mrs. Cassidy's.

It contained no explanation of how he had learned her new address, but was full of anxious questions, affectionate assurances, and an urgent underscored plea that she let him see her at once. The note had been delivered on Saturday by hand, Cassy informed her, and the gentleman himself had called on Sunday.

"I was after tellin' him," Cassy informed her in her dour, resentful voice, "I was after tellin' him I didn't expect you back until to-day, but he would have it you was here."

"Who is it?" George indifferently inquired.

"My tailor who made that suit for me. He wants some money."

"How much you owe him?"

"Twenty-five, I think it is."

"Can't you pay him?"

"Maybe next week. You tell that gentleman," she said to Mrs. Cassidy in an even voice, "if he comes again that I'm not in; I'm *never* in, understand?"

But that very evening when she and George, upon agreeing they were both due for steak and onions, had sallied forth in quest of them, her heart was sent knocking into her throat by finding Gerry waiting at the corner. The street lamps had not been lighted yet. It was a June day and the dying glory in the west, still illumined the city, turning thousands of windows into tiny squares of flashing flame. The light was reflected upon Gerry's unsmiling face, and she could clearly see the dark expression about his eyes and mouth as he lifted his hat and bowed.

"Who's that bird?" George inquired; "what's eating him?"

"That's Gerry Page," she answered casually; "you know, I told you about him. He used to be mushy about me when I was a kid. I lunched with him a couple of times when you were going over to Emeryville. Didn't notice anything peculiar about him; perhaps he's been drinking."

"He stared at you kind of funny, I thought."

"Oh, that's just Gerry's manner. He always stares at people."

Some minutes later when the conversation had drifted to other topics and they were established at a table in a restaurant-grill, she found her hand trembling so that her teeth chattered against the glass as she held it to her lips.

When they returned to the house, there was an envelope addressed to her slid into the crack where the two halves of the front door joined. Mrs. Cassidy was at the theatre; there had been nobody at home to answer the bell, or to receive the note. These probabilities

Zelda had foreseen, and half expecting to find some such message, she was up the front stairs well in advance of George, had clutched the envelope and concealed it, before he joined her to insert the key and admit them.

It was a letter of reproaches, and many underscored declarations of love, imploring her to telephone him in the morning. He *must* see her, he *must* talk to her, they *had* to meet and come to some understanding, he had a matter of the most vital importance to her happiness as well as his own to communicate.

"Why, it's all nonsense!" Zelda said impatiently, tearing the letter to bits and watching it disappear down the trap in the bath room where she had retired to read it. "I'm a married woman, a wife who loves and is happy with her husband. This man has no hold over me. I've done nothing I'm ashamed of. Why should I care a snap of my fingers about him? I've nothing to fear."

But early the next morning when she took Buster out for his airing, she wandered about until she found a Western Union office open at that hour, and sent the following telegram:

Can't see you for a few days. Will write soon. Be patient until you hear from me. Z.

Fourth of July week took them to Napa for the whole seven days, and she found the opportunity there to compose the contemplated letter. She could not fabricate, and she wrote the truth, explaining all that had happened, promising to repay the money as soon as she was able, and begging him not to try to see her again, to forgive and forget her as best he could.

"Wouldn't you think he'd be the kind to *give* us the two hundred," she thought bitterly.

But the money must somehow be raised and repaid him. She searched her brain for a person from whom she might borrow it. Boylston? Never *him!* . . . Ned?

How could she appeal to Ned to whom she had not written a line and from whom she had not heard for a year! . . . Maud de Reszke? Yes, Maud would lend it, if she had it, but Zelda had not the faintest notion where she was. . . . John? John, of course, would stand by her if she appealed to him; she had frequent letters from him; but there was small likelihood of John having such a sum. . . . Somewhere it must be had. Gerry would have to give her time, that was all. He didn't *need* the money! Why must she break her neck to repay him? She could find no answer, but she knew she must.

The afternoon of the very day she returned to the city he called at the house; Cassy admitted him and told him Miss Marsh was at home. Had he tipped the old woman to keep him informed? Zelda suspected it. Fortunately George had taken Buster out for a stroll in Golden Gate Park. Zelda dressed for the street, put on her hat, and went to meet Gerry in Cassy's shabby front parlor.

It was a distressing interview. At once Gerry began his reproaches. Why was she treating him so? What had he done to offend her? Didn't she care for him any longer? She had led him to think she returned his affection; what was it that had suddenly changed her? He couldn't believe for a moment after all that had happened, she was going to throw him aside like an old glove!

For a long time, she listened without reply. She was conscious of a sharp impatience, but she was aware too of a certain fear that set a curb upon her tongue. Somehow he must be placated, be made to see her situation, and realize that further intercourse between them was definitely and forever at an end. Not an easy matter to convince him. He was mad with desire for her; it was obvious he had had little sleep; he looked bad; his eyelids were red and there were lines she had never seen before about his mouth. He was not to be casually

dismissed; it would take time, meetings, arguments, a succession of reiterated and reiterated noes, noes, noes.

In the shallow bay window, looking out upon the unlovely street, she stood thinking these thoughts, barely hearing the man beside her. He came to her and tried to put his arms about her, but instantly she wheeled on him. With effort, she controlled herself.

"Come," she said, "if we must talk, let's get out of here. I don't want George to find you; I'm expecting him any minute."

They went out into the street and found a table in a deserted restaurant, and here Gerry began all over again. He was convinced he could tempt her by offers of gifts and money. The bracelet of diamonds and emeralds he had brought with him, and he showed it to her, talked of more jewels and of sums of money.

"You can have anything you want, honey, a thousand, five thousand! I'll put it in the bank for you and it will be yours to do what you will with, no questions asked."

For this she hated him. She watched him coldly, noticing how the bubbles in the corners of his mouth increased, grew white like foam, as he tumbled out his words. She went slowly over the ground again, trying to make him understand that their friendship was definitely at an end, but she could make no headway.

"No, no, no, no, honey. I won't listen to you. It can't be. You've got to be mine, understand. I can't eat nor sleep nor *live* without you! You've *got* to leave him and come to me."

Anger suddenly flamed up in her.

"Let's understand each other, Gerry, right here and now," she said sharply. "I've had a mild flirtation with you, nothing more. If it went further than I meant it to, I can only tell you I'm sincerely sorry. I'm really tremendously obliged to you for all you've done for me, for the lunches, the rides in the car, and so on. I believe you got as much pleasure out of them as I did, and maybe more; but let that pass. You gave me a good

time, and I thank you honestly, and I shall always be eternally grateful to you for the money you advanced, which will be repaid as soon as I am able. If you have been under the impression that there was an estrangement between my husband and myself, let me assure you it is at an end. He's been through a terrible time, and he was snatched back from death's door in the nick of time. If I had been a better wife to him, perhaps it wouldn't have happened. But that's all over and done with. The past is the past. It's the present that matters, and I'm going to devote myself to George from now on, and be as good to him as I know how. I'm sorry, I'm *terribly* sorry if I let you think you meant more to me than you do. I was bored with life and you were kind to me, and I shall always think gratefully of you. But you've got a totally wrong idea of the kind of woman I am, Gerry, if you thought for a moment, at *any* time, that I'd be unfaithful to my husband. I've always been square with him and I'll always *stay* square no matter what he does or what else happens. You're wasting your time and your breath on me if you think I'm going to go about with you any more. I regret I went as far as I did, I'd give anything in the world if I hadn't, but that can't be helped now. The point is,—and I want you to get this clearly,—I'm done with you once and for all. I'm a good woman and I know what you're after, and you're *not going to get it!*"

"Aaah, tie a can to that," Gerry said in a surly tone; "don't try any virtuous gag with me. You can't fool me. You may have fooled me once in making me believe you cared for me, making me believe you did long enough to get two hundred dollars out of me, but you can't do it again."

She flashed a look at him and saw that he was trembling. Suddenly the expression in his eyes made her tremble too. A premonition of what was coming struck her, and for a long minute they met look with look. Then he averted his, and scowling, continued:

"I know all about you, Zelda. I know all about you and that Kirk boy and about Doctor Boylston. When I met you again, I made it my business to find out. I wasn't wasting my time. Now there's no good in your trying to act as though you're as pure as the driven snow, because I happen to know you're not. You were free and easy before you married this ham actor, and there's no reason why you can't be nice to me now. You've got two hundred dollars out of me and you can have a lot more. It's up to you to be a good sport. I'll make it worth your while, you won't lose anything, and your husband needn't know a damn thing if you work it right."

"So," she said, and again on a deep breath, while the blood drained from her face and her fingers clenched, "so!"

She sat rigid for a while, hearing Gerry's voice hurriedly going on,—words—words—words. She waited until objects in the line of vision ceased swimming and until she marked the position of the doorway, and saw it clearly. Then she rose and without a backward look, walked toward it, stepping carefully, pushed it open, gained the street, turning her face homeward, the brilliant glitter of the late afternoon sun in her eyes.

George was there when she reached the house and she found him in gala mood. There had been a call from Cohen's Bureau, he had gone up at once to see about it, and Jakey had slated them to play for a whole week at the Oberon, a German beer hall in the city, where there was a stage and some sort of musical entertainment nightly offered its patrons. The musicians were all to be given a fortnight's vacation, and were to be replaced, temporarily, by a vaudeville program. Jakev had told him there was a good chance that he and Zelda might play the full two weeks. The important factor in George's eyes was that the Oberon was almost directly across the street from the Orpheum and

it seemed probable that Morrison might be persuaded to come over to see their act.

"We'll write him, huh, Zel'? That letter, you know? Just as you say, it won't do any harm, and maybe, maybe,—who knows? he might *like* us!"

He caught his wife about the waist, lifted her in the air, swirled her about, set her down and threw his big arms about her.

"Don't—*don't,* George. I'm feeling rotten. I don't know what's the matter with me. Ever since this morning, I've had a headache."

"Oh, kid, I'm sorry. Gee, that's too bad. You've been working too hard, Zel', going it too steadily; too much cooking, I think that's the trouble. Say, listen here, kid, let's celebrate to-night, huh? Can we afford it? I've a feeling the luck's turned. Let's chase ourselves out and tuck in a good dinner. Oh, say, Zel', come on! You and Georgie will go out and buy ourselves a swell feed, and let's have a little fizz water to celebrate. Perhaps not fizz water, but something red and wet. It'll do you good, Zel', and with that fortnight's engagement at the Oberon ahead of us, we ought surely to be able to blow in a couple of simoleons to-night."

"How much do we get?" Zelda asked dully.

"Forty."

"A week!"

"Well, shucks, Zel', you and I would play across the street from the Orpheum for nothing."

She was too tired, too emotionally shaken to argue. The prospect of getting dinner on the kerosene burner was not alluring. She had planned an oyster stew, had bought a couple of tamales and a bakery pie. The pie and tamales would keep! Cassy could take the can of oysters over to the girls at the theatre. Her head was buzzing, and it had been a fact that she had felt upset that morning when she had been getting breakfast. George might be right; she might be "going it too

steadily." A good dinner was perhaps just what she needed. She was too tired to think, anyway.

"I tell you what, Zel'," was George's conclusive argument, "let's go to the Oberon for dinner and see what the joint is like? We can size up the show and audience, and find out exactly what's expected of us."

§ 4

A long, long night of worry and speculation. The past rose up and reared its ugly head, inviting recognition with an insolent smile. Gerry's words came back to her over and over: "You were free and easy before you married this ham actor; there's no reason why you can't be nice to me, now." Her cheeks burned in the dark. She tapped her lips with her shut fist, and squeezed tight her eyes. Oh, for two hundred dollars to fling in his face! Oh, for two hundred dollars to cram down his throat! . . . Would he tell? That was the question. *Would he tell?* She knew at what price his silence could be bought, but that, come what might, she would never agree to pay. Never, never, never that. He could alienate George from her, he could break up her marriage, he could ruin her, but she would never give in to him. . . . George, a huge mountain beside her, breathed heavily and evenly. He did not know. Gerry did; they did; Phil Godfrey's mother had no doubt heard the story from the lips of Zelda's own aunt, and her son unquestionably was conversant with all the facts. And she, Zelda, had brought the man she had married back into the very midst of these babbling tongues! Oh, fool, fool that she was! They must get out, must get away, and quickly. This Oberon engagement. might lead to an Orpheum booking. That would be salvation indeed. Once secured, she and George headed east, she was safe. Then they might gossip about her all they pleased, Gerry might do his worst!

She could not sleep. From the bed, she crept to the

open window and knelt there between the limp lace curtains gazing out upon the coils of wire, the stack of ill-assorted bottles, the splintered and broken grocery boxes, and the gray, flat brick wall that reared itself skyward. A fog had come up in the night. Ghostly veils of it drifted by the window and the light from the alleyway reflected on its denser masses and threw tall shadowy shapes on the gray wall.

"You were free and easy before you married this ham actor; there's no reason why you can't be nice to me now."

Cautiously she returned to bed, and lay staring up into the darkness that seemed to press down upon her and reach for her with a thousand eager fingers, and once again began the weary cycle of her thoughts. After a long time she slept, slept on her back, without changing her position, her hands crossed upon her breast.

§ 5

She awoke at her usual hour. At seven o'clock, when she was accustomed to hook her skirt over her nightdress, pull on stockings and shoes, slip on a dressing sacque and a long coat to hide her makeshift costume, put Queenie in the area way, and lead Buster to the street with herself pursuing a yawning amble up and down the block, she opened her eyes, and found herself staring at the round-faced alarm clock. The thoughts of the night rushed back upon her like a flock of black vultures, ravenous for food, awaiting the signal of her opening eyelids to tear her once more. She was aware too, of decided physical misery. Her head was aching and a great lassitude dragged at her limbs. She heaved herself from the bed, her ankles pained sharply as she put her feet to the floor, and the room careened about and beneath her.

"Well," she exclaimed, half aloud, blinking the dizziness from her eyes, "I hope I'm not going to be sick!"

Pulling on her clothes, she started for the street, but got no further than the front door, not daring to venture down the long flight of wet steps. Fog blanketed the world, and the sidewalks, houses and street car tracks glistened wetly with it. Leaning against the unopened half of the door she let Buster run out by himself; the cold panel of the frosted glass was cool to her head and the tang of the morning air was refreshing.

"Just a bad night," she said again aloud. "Coffee'll fix me up." But the thought of coffee brought her a wave of distaste.

"Goodness! I guess I *am* ill!"

She called the dog, closed the door, and crept back to bed, and sleep came gratefully to her, laying its soothing hand upon her brow, quieting her for another two hours. But toward ten o'clock when she again awakened, her dull headache was still with her.

"If I lie here," she thought, "it will just get worse and worse. If I get up and bestir myself, I may get rid of it."

This time she thrust her feet into slippers and drew about her a torn and spotted wrapper. Although food had no appeal, she decided nevertheless to breakfast. She wanted to be out by eleven for during the wakeful hours of the night she had resolved to take her costume to a renovator; it could be cleaned in twenty-four hours and the following day she could devote to tightening hooks, mending tears, and sewing on new black sequins. It must make a brave appearance at the Oberon. She proceeded to light the kerosene stove, then sliced the long twisted loaf of French bread, and brought out from her improvised larder, butter, eggs, and jam. Every other moment, she had to pause and put her hand over her eyes.

"This is nonsense," she kept saying to herself; "this is ridiculous."

The coffee pot, which seemed to be particularly foul-smelling and horrible this morning, was put on the

burner to heat, and she commenced to clear the marble-topped table and set it for the meal. There were oranges but she cut only one; she wanted no fruit herself, and if George demanded eggs, he could do his own cooking. He slept soundly, humped up like a large animal, his broad back to the light, his black mop of hair sticking out over the pillow like the loose straw of a disintegrating whisk broom. She frowned at him, wondering unreasonably how he could be so indifferent to her misery. Shaking him by the shoulder, she only drew from him a sleepy grunt. It would be a tussle to rouse him, and at the moment she was not equal to it. Coffee first she decided; she would take some food to stop the stupid pain in her head, and then she would try again. Picking up a cup, she approached the stove, flipped up the lid of the granite pot to inspect its contents, and as she did so, the strong odor of coffee, hot and steaming, rushed up into her face, and sent her staggering back, the cup she held rattling on its saucer, bringing to her a wave of overpowering nausea.

"Oh!" she gasped; "oh!"

Holding to the foot of the bed to keep herself from falling, she sat down heavily in a chair, resting her head against its tall back.

For several minutes she remained thus, making no movement while the worst of the sick feeling and dizziness passed. She had to admit now that she was ill, and with eyes closed, her head resting inertly against the chair, she reviewed what she had eaten in the past twenty-four hours. . . . There was nothing; she had really been very judicious about her food. . . .

Suddenly an explanation occurred to her. Her eyes opened, a frown gathered between her brows, her thoughts raced, swiftly calculating, and as the suspicion of what was wrong grew upon her, fear crept into her dilating eyes. She sat up, one hand upon a chair arm, the other upon her heart. She remained upright, rigid like a statue, for one, two, three, four minutes. Then

without thinking what she did, she pulled herself to her feet and lay down upon the bed beside her husband, her roving eyes searching the corners of the ceiling, her brows creased in a heavy frown.

The coffee pot with great hissing came to a boil; it bubbled out of its spout and dribbled over its sides, falling sputtering on the burner, extinguishing the flame. Zelda did not move. Her eyes continued to search the white, cracked ceiling above, back and forth, back and forth, like an animal cornered in a cage. Her dry lips parted on a low moan.

"Oh, no—no—no—no—*no!*" she breathed, and there was agony in her voice.

§ 6

When she went out later to take her costume to the renovator's, she found several letters for her stuck into the mirror of the hat-rack in the hall where Cassy always put her lodgers' mail. One was a bulky, fat one from John, there was a postal from Mildred,—a picture of the Alamo and postmarked "Houston, Tex.,"—a communication from Mrs. Bryan in New York, asking her to call "relative to a position in the chorus of a first-class musical comedy going on the road," and a long letter from Gerry. Part of it read as follows:

Is it any fault of mine to love you? Can you blame me or can I blame myself for wanting you more than anything in this life? I have always taken with a grain of salt all this twaddle about love, this Romeo stuff that newspaper headliners spell in caps. I've always thought that a man took a kind of fancy to a girl, asked her to marry him, and that was all there really was to love. But I've learned differently, honey dear. I've learned to know the hell-and-heaven difference between the days when I'm sure of seeing you and the days I'm not. I know now what it means never to hear the telephone on my desk ring without hoping that it may be you that's calling, and I know what it means to have the sound of your voice make my heart leap into my throat,

and I know what it means to lie awake hour after hour at night saying to myself that if I don't win your love and can't have it, there's no use in anything. Why should this selfish, improvident, intemperate man, without the faintest appreciation of your goodness, your beauty, your great, splendid, glorious qualities, and the terrific sacrifices you are making for him day after day, why should he have you, when I, with the means to give you every comfort and every luxury you want, and—though I do say it,—with more culture and refinement, I, who worship the ground you walk on, who understand you and would do anything in this world to make you happy, can't have you? I love you; he doesn't. No, Zelda, he *doesn't,* not the way I do. I've bungled this whole thing. I've offended you, I've insulted you. I've gone about winning your friendship and affection with the clumsy tactics of a mucker. I can see all that now. I can see what an ass I've made of myself, and I'm sorry! It's so easy to write "I'm sorry," but if you could know the remorse that I've suffered since this afternoon and have to look forward to day after day, and week after week, and month after month, as I must, always with the same torturing regret and self-condemnation, you would know what lies behind *my* "I'm sorry."

Think of me as kindly as you can, honey, and try to find it in your heart to forgive. I'll make no more demands of you, I'll ask for no more favors, not even a caress from the tip of your littlest finger! But let me see you again, honey; some afternoon when you find it convenient, call me up and let's go to our Italian villa on the hill and sip more Angelica and nibble cakes, and let me tell you more eloquently than I can ever write it, how desperately I love you.

§ 7

George was clowning and carrying-on in what approximated a "green room" beneath the stage of the Oberon. He was making what Zelda mentally characterized as a "holy show of himself." Others on the same program with them were standing about, in and out of make-up, laughing and urging him on. A horrible set of people, Zelda thought them, some of Cohen's "head-liners," a trick bicycle rider, a tenor, black-face

buck and wing dancers, a pair of German comedians, one fat, the other thin, in imitation of Weber and Fields. She wished George had more dignity. This was the same man, she thought, who less than a month ago, had drunk a bottle of poison, preferring death to life. To-night he was in the wildest of spirits; she suspected he had been drinking, there was no other way to account for his exuberance. She went to her dressing room and began to cold cream her face. A weight, a heavy weight, lay upon her heart. What would her unbalanced, excitable husband say if she told him what was troubling her? When the present engagement came to an end, she might break the news to him. She had thought to keep it to herself for a few days; she had thought, too, that she would let him enjoy this brief interval of fun without sharing with her the responsibility that weighted her own spirit. She saw now that it would crush him He could not, would not look kindly upon a child. It would be the end of all their plans: New York in August, the road company during the winter, Spain the following summer. It would mean, Zelda realized, that she would have to remain behind in New York, supposing they won their way back east, at Madame Boulanger's probably, and George would be off on the road without her, travelling with some comic opera company or a Broadway success of the previous winter. And she knew by this time how George behaved himself when she was not beside him to curb and admonish him. She knew the kind of life he would lead away from her. . . . Remittances? The first week he might send her a money order, and perhaps the second, and she would even concede a third, but after that, only excuses or no word at all. She did not mind for herself, That did not concern her. It would be the child, *their* child, for whom she must think and for whom she would have to provide. . . . How could she have a baby? How was it possible for her to go through with nine long months of burden and unshapeliness? And after that a living child,

seeking her breasts for food, needing her hands for care, calling upon her heart every minute of the day and night for love and tenderness! Another year beyond the nine months, and perhaps a year beyond that! . . . What a fool, what a careless *fool* she'd been! Ah, that was the way so many women were caught! . . . She was in for it. No escape. She was tied, chained, helpless. . . .

"Ah, Buster, Buster," she cried with a quaver in her voice, "what in the world am I going to do!" The dog, curled up in the corner of the room, instantly raised his head, pricked up his ears, and beat the floor with his tail.

The door burst open and there was George, flushed, glowing, excited, waving a white card in his hand.

"Zelda—Zelda—girlie—kid," he cried, "it's come—look! it's come, it's come! Luck, darling, luck at last! The old boy sent it in by one of the ushers. . . ."

She took the calling card. "Mr. William V. Morrison," and in pencil across its face, "Come and see me at my office tomorrow. W. V. M."

§ 8

"Doctor? This is Zelda talking. I want to see you—professionally, if I may. I know you're not actively practising now, but this is something important and I need your help and advice. Shall I come to you? I don't want to intrude."

"Who is it speaking?"

"Zelda,—Zelda Marsh."

"Oh, . . . I didn't hear what you said. What's that again?"

She repeated carefully. Fumbling, as before, at the other end of the line; his embarrased cough.

"Well, perhaps I'd better call. If you'll give me your address, I'll come right over."

"Maybe this afternoon would be better, Doctor. I'm on Ellis Street." She gave the number.

Hanging up the receiver, she slowly made her way back to the house. The fog was high and a brassy light filtered through it from the sun, giving the day a yellowish tinge. Wearily she climbed the stairs, flat footed, a hand to each knee, swaying from side to side with each step, like an old woman. George had gone during her absence. He had left a scribbled note:

Morrison said he would expect the Chicago wire this P.M. See him at four. Home right after. Say a prayer. Looks good.
George.

And at the bottom of the note he had drawn a little man, waving arms and legs, with an up-curving line for a grinning mouth.

Zelda sank into a chair, the paper dangling by a corner from her finger tips, her hat still upon her head, her gloves and purse in her lap, and so she remained for some time, her lips pinched, a frown of pain between her eyes.

Presently she roused herself, removed her tight clothes and corsets, and made herself a cup of weak tea and lay down upon the bed. She had learned that by noon her discomfort usually passed but it was still lacking an hour of midday and her recumbent position made her feel all the more ill. With a sigh, she got up again, established herself by the window and wrote to John. Page after page of a pad she filled with her pencil.

"I'd tell him," she wrote, "but I can't see the good. After all the responsibility is mine. I hate to do it. It seems so degrading—but what else is there for me? I know what would happen if I let him go on without me, and if we get the Orpheum engagement, it's going to kill me to go through with it. But even if I could stand it for twenty weeks, supposing Morrison books us for any such length of time, what then? It would be so much more dangerous then, and here I have a doctor handy who's my friend and whom I can trust and absolutely rely upon . . ."

§ 9

Boylston came a few minutes after three. He had a carnation in his buttonhole and for the first time she could remember, he carried a cane and gloves. There was a jaunty air about him; even his nose glasses and the gold chain over his ear seemed to have a bright, new shine to them. Zelda was in no mood for pleasantries. She led him into Cassy's dowdy parlor, shut the door, and went straight to the point.

As she talked a change came over him; she could see his professional manner settling upon him, the corners of his mouth went down, he pursed his lips, drew breath with whistling in-takes, slowly wagged his head, and rubbed the heels of his palms together as so often she had seen him do in by-gone days.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, my dear," he said in a troubled way, "that's most unfortunate. I see just how you're situated. You have my deepest sympathy, Zelda."

"It isn't a serious undertaking, is it, Doctor?"

"Well-a—that is,—no, it's a very minor operation. It's quite against the law, you know."

"Oh, yes, I'm aware of that. That's why I came to you."

"To *me*?"

"I didn't know whom else to go to. I know you used sometimes to do such things——"

"That's a long, long time ago. . . . That's a *long* time ago."

"But you'll help me surely, Doctor. Why, I don't know what I'll do, if you don't help me!"

"Well, you see, Zelda, I don't practise any more. I've retired."

"But you could do this for me, couldn't you?"

"Aaaah . . . I'm afraid . . . you see, it's against the law. I have no office any longer. There's no place where I could perform such an operation."

"It wouldn't take long, would it, Doctor? How long *would* it take?"

"Oh, it's simple enough; few minutes, that's all; you, perhaps, would need a couple of hours' rest. There's nothing to it; no anesthetic required."

"And couldn't you do this for me? You're an old friend, Doctor Boylston; I haven't another soul to turn to. I told you I was saying nothing to my husband. I haven't even him to stand by me."

The physician squirmed uncomfortably. The flower in his buttonhole sagged, loosened and fell to the floor; he made no effort to pick it up.

"I'm afraid, my dear Zelda, it's impossibble. It's against the law, you know. I have no office any longer. There's no place where I could perform such an operation. . . ."

He repeated his arguments distressfully, and the light of understanding broke upon Zelda. Without further remark, she listened to him with a pleasant fixed smile until his flow came to an end. Then she asked one more question, asked it although she knew before his answer.

"Could you send me to somebody, Doctor, somebody I could trust?"

"Hmm—hmm . . . 'fraid not, Zelda. I'm out of touch, unfortunately. Don't know anybody that does that sort of thing. It's strictly against the law, you know——"

"Yes, yes, I know all about that. Well then, I won't trouble you any longer. It was very good of you to come to see me, and I thank you just the same. . . . Oh, look, Doctor, you've dropped your flower."

She picked it up and replaced it prettily in his buttonhole.

§ 10

"Whist, Miss Marsh, I got a note for ye. He guv it to me to give to you and says not one word to your husband."

Cassy detained her with a yellow claw on her forearm and pushed the envelope into her hand. Zelda slipped it into her blouse.

"Listen, Cassy, I want to talk to you, I want you to help me. Can I come up to your room for a minute?"

"Cum along if you don't mind the stairs."

Zelda followed the old woman up two flights to a musty den at the back of the house. She sat on the sagging edge of a couch and told her story.

"Morrison's booked us," she said; "Mr. Selby came back with the news yesterday, and we're good for sixteen weeks, perhaps more. I don't dare go on with it in my condition. You see how it is? And Mr. Selby mustn't know a thing about it. I understand these things are done in a morning or an afternoon, and I want to slip off quietly some day and get it over with. I'm feeling terrible in the mornings, you know. You can send me to somebody. The girls over at the Alcazar used to say you always helped them out when they got in trouble."

The old woman screwed up her face and winked slyly.

"Whose is it?" she whispered.

"Whose is what?" Zelda asked, not catching the creature's meaning; "I don't understand."

"Whose is it?" Cassy repeated, grimacing and pointing her finger. "Is it him with the light hair?"

Zelda felt horror creeping over her.

"He's a foine feller, that wan. And you could do better by him than the man you got. He's liberal handed, I'll say that for him, and he's sure daffy about ye."

"Don't!" cried Zelda, fighting down her gorge. It took a minute to get herself in hand. She could not afford to affront Cassy.

"You're quite wrong." She went on to explain the situation as best she could, but every now and then she had to pause to bite her lip and steady herself. The old hag's implication hit hard.

Mrs. Cassidy listened to her with one eyebrow

cocked, then stopped her with a silencing motion of her withered hand, went to a shabby desk, bulging with papers, rummaged about in a drawer, found a card, copied the address and brought it to Zelda.

"The best in the wor-rld," she whispered with a nudge and a wink, "an' all he'll charge ye will be tin dollars. . . . Good luck to ye."

On the way downstairs, Zelda paused at the next landing, and in the light of the window at the end of the hall, read Gerry's letter.

I've been hoping each day to have some word from you. You're hard, honey, you don't easily forgive. I'm not asking much, just to see you again some day when you can arrange it without embarrassment; an hour, that is all; half-an-hour, fifteen minutes! . . . I think I'm going crazy, Zelda,—crazy for love of you. People say I'm looking bad. Well, I ought to. I don't sleep. I *can't* sleep. One face haunts me, one name blazes out of the darkness just above my bed. Sometimes I think I can catch the intonation of your voice, sometimes I think I feel the touch of your fingers. It's these fancies, bringing me for a moment the illusion of reality, that are all that I live for, all that keep me going. . . .

I'll tell you something,—although I'm a fool to do so,—but you don't know what hell I've been through. *I've been watching your house!* I can't help it. I have to have a glimpse of you. The other day I saw you go out with your husband and I waited nearly three hours for your return. I hoped you'd be alone for I was going to try to speak to you. What would you have done, honey? Would you have let me say a few words? Would you have let me tell you I'd been waiting three hours just for the sound of your voice? Oh, Zelda honey, I can't believe I've lost you and that you're going out of my life with the memory of that last awful afternoon leaving its biting sting and its humiliation with me for the rest of my days! Be kind, Zelda; be kind just as you would be to that pet dog of yours. You're always loving and gentle with animals; be loving and gentle to me too.

I didn't mean to go on like this when I started to write you. I began it to say that if you're *ever* in trouble, or if you *ever* need a friend, or if you want someone to turn to who won't

ask questions or make demands, think of me, and give me a chance. Honey, I don't mean to hurt your feelings, but it is possible you and your husband may disagree again; you have before; it might happen once more. He's erratic. You've told me that often enough, and so if ever you need help or assistance or advice, give me an opportunity to prove my trustworthiness and blot out my terrible mistake. You have my address, and my 'phone numbers, both office and home. One word at any time of day or night will bring me to your side no matter where I am.

When she had finished it, Zelda looked thoughtfully for a moment through the dusty window into the dusty street, then slowly tore it into small squares and when she passed the bath room on the lower floor, stepped in, shut the door, and watched the pieces disappear down the drain.

§ 11

The house on Turk Street was one in a row of many others exactly like it. Standing in a solid mass on the side of a hill, shoulder to shoulder, they seemed to throw their weight in a direction opposed to the slope of the ground. All were shabby, blistered of paint, discolored, decayed, and patches of shrubbery and neglected lawn languished beside their steep worn steps. In the window of the one Zelda sought, was an enameled sign: "Ludwig Koppel, M.D."

A wrinkled old crone admitted her, a creature like another Cassy, except that this one was white, white-haired, white-faced, white of blouse and skirt, and these last, Zelda noted, were none too clean. The effect of the old woman was almost cadaverous. Blinking at the caller as though she saw as well as heard with difficulty, she piloted her into the stuffy parlor. The house smelled of disquieting odors, a fearful mixture, in which the stench of disinfectants predominated.

Zelda began to be uneasy; her fingers grew wet

with perspiration and she kept twisting and interlocking them in a vain attempt to wipe them dry; tense and rigid she sat on the edge of a chair, now and then pressing her lips together to stop their disconcerting trembling. She wished now that she had told George; she wished now that she had brought somebody with her, better to have had Cassy, dreadful though she was, than to have ventured here alone. Her apprehension rapidly increased. She was contemplating tiptoeing to the front door, cautiously opening it, and making her escape, when the white crone reappeared, beckoned, and waved her down the dark hall toward the rear of the house.

Her first glimpse of Doctor Koppel did not allay her fears. He was huge, with bushy red side-whiskers and bronze hair which swept from his high forehead like a lion's mane. His hands were enormous and hairy, and he wore glittering gold-rimmed spectacles and a dingy linen duster. Cassy had told her to tell him she had sent her, and Zelda gave her own name as Mrs. Springer. The physician made no effort to reassure her although her nervousness was obvious; he asked a question or two, made a few notes, and led the way into his surgery.

After it was over, he bade her rest a while. The aged crone appeared once more. Zelda, feeling faint and rather tearful, was assisted to a small room across the hall, beneath the stairs, where there was a couch with a folded gray blanket across its foot. The woman covered her, gave her a drink, brought her hat, gloves and purse, put them on a chair beside her head, half pulled the shade, and departed. For a time Zelda lay as they had left her. Then, hiccoughing, she began to cry.

§ 12

Toward four o'clock she arose and prepared to go home. Koppel patted her shoulder and offered to tele-

phone for a hack, but Zelda declined. She was quite all right again, she said, and preferred to walk. Once or twice, however, before she reached her door, she felt uncomfortably dizzy, and had to stop to steady herself for a moment, holding to whatever came to hand. She had decided to tell George as soon as she got home what she had done; she saw no reason for keeping it from him any longer, and she expected she would require his help and care for a day or so. The fortnight at the Oberon had come to an end; the present week was a week of idleness, and the following Sunday began the Orpheum engagement. It had been this interval of rest that had persuaded her to postpone no longer the step she had just taken.

The flight of steps before Cassy's house had never seemed so steep, or so long. She let herself in. The light of the day was still in her eyes, the back of the house was black and she had to grope her way toward the door of her room. She fumbled with the knob and opened it. George was sitting there in one of the chairs, bent forward, elbows on knees, his fingers thrust into his black hair. As she entered he raised his head and looked at her, and the expression on his face almost brought a cry to her lips. He was chalky white and she remembered how he looked the night when he had tried to destroy himself. She called his name and came toward him but he only stared at her, his face working. Suddenly he rose, caught her by her two arms, and half dragged, half lifted her to the window where the light fell upon her face; there he searched it, his jaw gripped, the clasp of his two hands upon her arms hurting her.

"Why, George, *George!* What is it? What's the matter?"

Her mind leaped in advance of his words: the contract had fallen through, Morrison had called it off! George shook her in his grip and a wave of pain engulfed her.

"Tell me, tell me the *truth!*" he cried between clenched teeth and he shook her again.

"D-don't, George, don't. You're hurting me. I'm not well."

"Tell me the *truth,*" he repeated.

"What truth?" she asked faintly. Her head swam and black dots floated before her eyes.

"Tell me——" he began, then pushed her roughly from him. She fell to the floor. Turning, without seeing, he covered his face with his hands.

"Oh G-god," he sobbed, "I know it's true, I know it, I know it. . . ."

"Know what?" Zelda asked with effort. He wheeled on her, catching her again, dragging her upright to her knees. Seizing her hat, he wrenched it from her head, the long hatpins jerking the yellow coils loose, hurting her fiercely.

"How many were there before me? Kirk, Boylston —who else? Tell me, you damned whore,—tell me before I *kill* you!"

And as she understood in a flash Gerry's handiwork, her first sensation was only one of acute sorrow for her husband. She felt the color drain from her face, she felt herself wilting in the fierce grip of George's two hurting hands.

"That's it, is it?" he cried, and threw her down again. He sank into his chair and presently she heard him moaning. For a long time there was no other sound in the room. Then the dog whimpered and came to her nuzzling her hand. Zelda, on the floor, paid no heed; she leaned against the wall, her yellow hair fallen, half coiled over one shoulder, the gold hairpins dangling from it. Her thoughts passed from George, and fixed themselves on Gerry,—Gerry, who, with one hand could write such pleading love letters, and with the other deal her this foul blow. His purpose now was clear; she understood what he had meant in writing: "If you're

ever in trouble, if you ever need a friend, think of me and give me a chance." When George was done with her, she must perforce seek him! . . . And as the full appreciation of his duplicity and his treachery broke over her, she knew for the first time in her life, what it meant to hate.

"He told you, did he?" she asked dully.

"He? Who? . . . Who do you mean?" There was a new note in George's voice.

"Where did you hear these—these lies?"

"Lies! Call them lies? I knew you would. But I can have the truth! I'll have every one of these statements investigated, or drag the admission out of you! That would be the simpler way!"

"George, listen to me. Who told you these things about me?"

"It doesn't make any difference who told me."

"I have a right to know who's slandering me."

"Slander?" His overwrought voice slid up the scale to a shrill scream. "Slander? Can you deny these?" He caught up a paper from the table. "Can you deny you had a lover by the name of Michael Kirk from the years 1897 until 1899, that it was proved you had illicit relations with him because his mother caught you in the act; that you ran away from home and became the mistress of Ralph B. Boylston, a physician, who had offices in this city and that you lived with him in open adultery from about 1900 to 1903? Can you deny that? . . . Deny it, I dare you!"

"He wrote the information down for you," she said bitterly; "perhaps you paid him for it!"

"He? Who? . . . Who the devil do you mean? . . . Cassy, the old hag, is my informant, if you want to know. It's common knowledge about you, in your own home town. Everybody knows it. She came to me with her foul whisperings, wanted to sell me the information! G-god, I suppose I could have had it from

any newsboy! This is hers—this paper's hers. Wanted to sell it to me, I tell you. I took it away from her. You'll find her where I left her,—if she isn't dead!"

"He bribed her. He bribed her to tell you."

George reached for her, dragged her to her knees again and this time caught her by the throat.

"Who do you mean by 'he'?" He was nearly choking her, but she made no resistance. When he had freed her so that she could speak she told him.

"Page—huh! Gerald Page! Another one, huh? Another one,—tell me—tell me!"

She caught at his hands, tearing free his strangling hold. A vision of all she had done and suffered for him flashed before her. Her child, her child that she had sacrificed! Fury blinded her. She rose, staggering.

"No, he's not! Never! Never! . . . You beast! I've given up everything for you, done everything, denied myself everything! When I married you, you were no better than I. With you, it wasn't a question of love, or of being tricked; it was plain lust, gratification. There's a word for men like you. Promiscuous though you'd been, I accepted you and forgot the past. I took you believing I knew all about you, but I had no conception of your selfishness. Everything and everybody you are ready to sacrifice to your vanity, your petty wants and wishes, your comforts and your pleasures. I'm done, done, do you hear? I never want to see you or hear from you again. You and your sex are all alike! Men—*men!* There isn't a decent man in the world! . . . My baby, my baby. . . ." Her voice broke; she was thinking that if it had been a man child, she was glad she was not to bring him into the world. George flung an oath at her.

"Got a child, too, have you? A child I know nothing about? A brat you've borne some other man that I've been supporting? G-god, there's no infamy to which you haven't stooped. You've tricked me all the way! You've lied to me, made a fool of me, broke me!

You took success from me when I had it almost within my grasp, you made me give up the stage where I was acknowledged, and you dragged me into cheap vaudeville, ruining my career, bringing me down to your level, and now, damn you, you tell me you're through with me, and there isn't a decent man in the world! Well, find me a decent woman,—find me one—find me one! *You* wouldn't recognize her if you met her! Through with me, are you? Well, I'm through with *you!* Get out, y'understand? get out, and find some other fool to dupe. I don't need you. I can find someone else to play the sketch with me, and I'll keep faith with Morrison. Thought you had me, didn't you? Thought I couldn't go ahead with the Orpheum if you walked out on me, and that I'd come crawling, grovelling to your feet and beg you to stand by me? Well, this time, you're the one that's fooled! I can get twenty girls that can do your bit and do it a damn sight better than you, let me tell you. I've carried you, tried to make something of you, taught you everything you know, and by God, you stand before me now and call me selfish! Done with me, are you? Oh-o no. You'll never have that satisfaction to hug to your heart for the rest of life. . . . I kick you out, y'understand?—kick you out! Get out and do your soliciting up and down the street. You know how to do it! You've fooled half-a-dozen men. A practised hand, I'd call you. I don't give a damn about you, I don't care whether you starve or rot. Get out, do you hear me? *Get out!*"

And even as she stood, swaying a little, holding to the window casing with the room swimming before her eyes, she considered whether or not she should stay. If she went, she knew she would not return, and he needed her, needed her desperately. Dissolution, ruin, death, such would be his fate if she took him at his word. In two, in five minutes at the most, he would break, sobbing out his heart, wanting her, regretting his abuse, ready to implore forgiveness. She hesitated. But

beyond this scene, she saw other and other scenes, stretching on into the future when at the slightest remonstrance from her, the least annoyance, her past would be flung in her teeth. No end. Never a finish. Always he would find the words to hurt her, to vilify her. The vision stretched on into the years, for the rest of life.

She turned then, mechanically picking up her hat from the floor, gathering purse and gloves, went toward the door, and passed into the hall. A frightened figure on the stairs scuttled up to the floor above. Cassy listening. Zelda did not look. At the front door she paused, thrust her hair into place, secured it with what hairpins her fingers could find, pulled on her hat, and turned with both hands the double lock. A thought of Buster came to her, and a dry sob rose in her throat. Back in the room, she could hear George's wild bellowing of grief. Then she went out, closing the door slowly and definitely behind her.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

§ 1

THEY called her just plain "Marsh," at the City and County Hospital, and once when another convalescent, shuffling about the ward in the gray, heelless, crash slippers and dirty yellow wrapper with which patients were furnished, picked up her chart that hung at the foot of her bed, and asked in idle interest: "Your first name's 'Zelda,' ain't it, Marsh? That's a funny one, 'Zelda,' " she winced as though some covering had been snatched from her body. Doctor Boylston had been responsible for her real name appearing on the hospital register. She would have preferred being known as "Springer." Half the women in the ward were booked under other names than their own. But Zelda had long ago ceased to care about her name, or care very much about anything. She felt wretched most of the time, and oh, so weak!

For nearly three months now she had been at the City and County, and often it seemed to her that she had known no other life. Beyond the four walls of Ward 35, there were a city and people, of course, a man named George Selby, who was her husband, who was playing in vaudeville, and who had with him a dog called "Buster." But George and Buster and the outside world were all remote, and concerned some other entity than her own. Of far more interest to her was the fact that Doctor Selig was late of a morning, that a new interne had been assigned "35," that Miss Carmody, the head nurse, had a headache and was cross, that

they were going to have prunes as dessert for the third consecutive day, that "Old Pumpkin," as everyone spoke of the occupant of Bed Number 19 was bad again and would probably give them all another sleepless night, that Snyder, Number 3, was due to "croak" within the next day or two, and that she wished "The Witch," as she herself had christened Number 10, would either get well or follow Snyder's example.

Three months of life in death. They had brought her there in late July, and it was now mid-October. At first she had believed she was going to die,—Doctor Boylston had expected her to,—and she was quite content to go. Later on when chill followed fever and fever followed chill, day after day, her apathy in regard to living passed, and she longed for death. Lastly came the phase when the very thought of effort exhausted her, and her one conscious desire was for peace, to be ignored, to be let alone. She was but a skeleton of her former self; her hands were long, skinny things like the claws of a bird, most of her hair had fallen out, the dyed ends had been cut off, and it hung now its old lustreless straw yellow in uneven lengths about her ears.

"You'll have to help with the trays, Marsh," Miss Carmody told her one day; "you've been here several weeks, and if you want to remain, you'll have to lend a hand."

Want to remain! Where else could she go?

The ward was a surgical one of thirty beds, most of the time crowded to capacity, and filled with the most horrible and pitiful cases. Zelda had grown indifferent to the gray-haired patients. Few were as young as she. She had grown indifferent too, to the haggard scarecrows in slippers and flannel robes, who slip-slapped about the room, quarrelling over the rockers by the windows where in the mornings there was a bit of sun, grown indifferent to the bandaged heads, the hollow cheeks and wan faces, the foul obscenities which sometimes burst from cracked and withered lips, the shrieks

that often split the air at dressing time when the doctor, accompanied by the interne and surgical nurse made his rounds from bed to bed, grown indifferent to the significance of the white screens that Miss Carmody or Miss Jukes, the night nurse, brought in and arranged about a bed, presaging one event, the white figure, itself, some time later, wrapped in a sheet, wheeled out upon a stretcher; and she had even grown indifferent to the awful stench of formaldehyde that prevailed throughout the ward. The first day she had entered it, despite her misery in body and soul, she had thought it impossible to keep what little strength and life remained to her in such an atmosphere; the disinfectant stung her eyes, raked her throat and burned her lungs. But all that had passed now. She used to watch new arrivals wiping their eyes and holding their breaths to avoid the hurting inhalation, and sometimes she was moved to tell them they would get used to it. Her sensibilities had become deadened in these three months, and more than once when a witness to a death-bed parting where a mother and daughter, or a husband and wife took leave of one another, she had looked on with sober, dry eyes.

Help with the trays!

She was sure there was malice behind the mandate; it was devised in cold blood either to hasten her death or to drive her prematurely from the hospital. From the first she had mistrusted Miss Carmody, and was now satisfied that the nurse had a grudge against her. Every step seemed to call from her the last ounce of strength; the trays shook in her grasp and the liquids spilled; Miss Carmody scolded and the patients whingly complained and some cursed her. But Zelda dared not protest. There was the worse fate of being turned out in the street with no place to go.

§ 2

On the afternoon she had parted from George and had closed Cassy's door definitely behind her, giddy and shaken to the depths of her being, she had made her way down the street without sense of direction, intent only to step carefully so as not to fall, and to find a spot where she could sit down, collect herself and think what next she ought to do. Some vague notion had pressed in the back of her brain of going to the Mechanics Library where she and Michael had so often met, but she had proceeded only a block or so, when a sudden vertigo had seized her, sending her dizzy and groping into the Family Entrance of a saloon close by. There she had found a seat in an empty, curtained booth, had ordered a cup of black coffee, had found it weak and flat, and had sent the waiter for whiskey. That brought back her ebbing strength in a flood, warmed her stomach and steadied her.

In her purse she had found fifteen dollars and a few cents. The money and the clothes on her back were all she possessed; she had neither a bag nor so much as a comb and brush. Meyerowitz had seemed to her the one and only objective; she had tried to remind herself how cordial and friendly he had been. Surely he would find a place for her as an extra, once he understood her extremity. To appeal to Boylston or Gerry did not even occur to her. Meyerowitz in the morning, she had told herself. Rest now—immediate rest. She felt she had been through a great physical strain as well as a mental one. She was badly shaken from George's rough handling. If she was to have strength to get to the Alcazar on the morrow, she must take care of herself. Oh, for a bed on which to stretch her tired body, a pillow on which to lay her weary head, a room where she could think and be alone!

The lodging house near the Wigwam Theatre where she and George had stayed when they first came to the

city had suggested itself as a place of refuge. She was known there! They would take her in without scrutinizing too closely the absence of luggage. She would have to have some sort of satchel, before she would be admitted even there, so presently when she felt she could trust herself again to the street she had ventured forth and purchased a cheap imitation leather suitcase, a fifty-cent nightgown and a few necessary toilet articles.

Until far into the next morning, sleep was denied her, but she had not resented this. She wanted to lie very still and quiet, to stare up into the darkness and think of the fearful happenings of the previous day, think of George, of herself, of their meeting, the beginning of their friendship, their marriage and of all they had faced together and lived through together, their bickerings, his selfishness and egotism, her own shortcomings as a wife,—and to think, too, of Buster with his alert ears, and dark understanding eyes.

When she awoke later in the day from the exhausted sleep which finally came to her, she did not feel so far restored either mentally or physically as she had hoped to be. Memories of happy hours with George immediately returned to harass her. She knew his need of her. Repeatedly she asked herself what was to become of him without her guiding hand. A vision of the silly, simpering fool he would engage to play her part in the sketch came to torment her, a woman who would use him for her own purposes, abet him in his intemperances and extravagances, a woman who would be Buster's mistress! That turned the knife in her heart.

By afternoon she found the courage and strength to present herself at Meyerowitz's office. The old gentleman had been as kind as she had hoped, but there was no need of her for the next two or three weeks.

"We do 'Quex' next week, then 'Lord and Lady Algy' and after that 'The Second in Command.' I don't see exactly where I could fit you in. We don't need extras in any of these. . . . Up against it, hey, Zelda?"

"Yes, very 'up against it,' " she had smiled back.

"Suppose helping Cassidy,—you remember our wardrobe woman?—you'd think rather beneath you."

Zelda had hesitated for a moment.

"I'd prefer anything else," she had answered on a deep breath.

Meyerowitz had shrugged his large shoulders. He was disappointed.

"Very well," she had said quickly. "I'll help Cassy. I've *got* to do something.

"Good girl," he had said approvingly. "Just temporarily, you know. The old creature's getting queer of late. 'Fraid I'll have to replace her. It's too bad; she's been here so long. You help her out for two or three weeks and I'll find a bit for you soon. Come 'round about ten o'clock Monday."

But Monday morning at ten o'clock, Zelda was being rattled in an ambulance out to the City and County Hospital. On Saturday she was hot and feverish. She bought half-a-dozen quinine capsules and during the night took them all, but they brought her no relief. Sunday she had been decidedly worse, and by afternoon her head was rocking with fierce pain and a fever was whipping her blood to a gallop. It had come to her then that she had not escaped unscathed from Doctor Koppel's hands, and that something was amiss. She could think of no one to whom to appeal except Boylston, and Mrs. Conboy, her landlady, frightened by her condition, had been only too willing to hurry to the nearest drug store and telephone him to come to see her.

He had arrived about nine o'clock that same evening, and as the gravity of her condition was borne in upon her from his concern and obvious fear of being identified with her case, in spite of her misery, a certain resignation had descended to her, and she had ceased to care whether she appeared at the Alcazar Theatre the next morning or not, or in fact what became of her.

Boylston had hastily taken himself off, leaving a twenty-dollar gold piece in Mrs. Conboy's hand, and the address of another physician. That doctor had appeared an hour later, had exhausted Zelda by questions she declined to answer, had left some pills to be taken every hour and instructions for the use of an ice pack, and by morning she was on her way to Ward 35 in the City and County Hospital in an ambulance.

Then had commenced the long, weary stretch of life in death, chills and fever, fever and chills, wasting the flesh from her bones, turning her delirious, beating her down, down, down, until she hovered at death's door. In the fleeting moments of rationality vouchsafed to her, she knew she was dying, that the shadowy figures who came near her bed, watching her, ministering to her, expected her to die. Words between a man and woman close beside her bed wedged their way one day into her consciousness. Long afterwards she identified the man as Doctor Selig and the woman as Miss Carmody. The physician's comment came with flat brusqueness.

"Bad, bad business. Damn these dirty doctors. . . . No friends, has she? You'll have her a couple of days, I guess; not much more. There's nothing to be done; nature'll kill or cure."

Three months ago! For the first week, for the first ten days she had lain between life and death, waiting, waiting for the beckoning finger. Then slowly as if tired of its mad race, tired of watching for the signal that did not come, the fever abated, the chills grew less violent and less frequent, and by infinitesimal degrees the ward, the beds, their horrible occupants, Miss Carmody, Doctor Selig, the young, fresh-faced internes, the dreary routine of each twenty-four hours grew upon her clearing senses and became her daily life. Awakening interest in her surroundings distressed and frightened her; she tried to relapse into the indifferent state when she had been unable to tell morning from after-

noon, or day from night. Rest, peace, to be let alone, to be ignored, forgotten, these were all she cared for, and now:

"You'll have to help with the trays. . . ."

§ 3

Not to be sent away, not to be turned into the street!

A new want, a thousand times stronger than her former wish for peace. It became a dreadful fear, her one concern. Sometimes just the thought of having to go on with life outside of the stinking, ghastly ward brought a trickle of weak tears. The burden of living again was more than she could face. Help with the trays? Brutal, cruel, but oh, so infinitely preferable to being told she had to go!

"I'll help with the trays, I'll help with the trays," Zelda had whispered with trembling eagerness to herself.

"Is there any other kind of work I can do 'round here, Miss Carmody?" she had begged the efficient, bustling head nurse.

"We'll find something more for you, by and by," this arbiter of life had answered. "You get well, Marsh, and get out of here," she had added, bustling away, "that's my advice to you."

"But—but I'm so weak," Zelda had moaned.

"Get strong then," had been the parting shot.

Zelda had crept back to the comfort of her bed, and had cried a little, and then gratefully had sunk to sleep.

"Come, come, Marsh; it's nearly twelve. Get up now, and hustle. See that 24 gets her tray first. She's being shipped home this afternoon; there's a laparotomy coming in."

Twelve o'clock already! Less than as many minutes it seemed. Get strong, yes; she was willing to get strong, but how? How whistle strength back when her knees and hands shook, and beads of sweat stood upon her

lip as she bore the trays from the pantry to beds and back again?

Standing at the shallow bay window of the ward she would look out on Portrero Avenue and watch the medical students play pranks on the driver of the jingling horse car that teetered on its tracks past the hospital. She could see part of the other buildings, the roofs of the long runways connecting them. A row of shabby stores and shacks stood across the street, and to the right a dense grove of melancholy eucalyptus trees dripped water with the fog and bent their plumed heads to angry rustling with the wind. Beyond lay San Francisco, and beyond San Francisco, the world, and she shuddered at the thought of knowing either again. The students jumping off and on the horse cars, running to and from their clinics, laughing, clapping one another on the back, brought a wave of faintness to the woman at the window. Their vitality appalled her; the waste of strength sickened her. Miserably she crept back to bed.

There she would lie for long hours with scarcely the flutter of an eyelid, thinking of old days and old ways, and she liked best to recall the time when she was a little girl living with the station agent's family on the prairie,—the prairie that woke to the long pencil rays of the red sun and slept to its dying glimmer in the west. That had been the time of Nimrod, and his puzzled little face poking itself through the rough boarding of his pen as her rather carried her away from him, returned repeatedly to trouble her. . . . Zelda Marsh? . . . What became of that girl, did anybody know?

Life, turgid, thick, muddy, stretched in a seething, foaming wake behind her; before lay blackness, a void, and the terror of the unknown.

CHAPTER II

§ 1

JOHN'S round white moon face with its heavy eyebrows, large features and big teeth flashing in a great scimitar of grin, looked almost beautiful to Zelda as, lugging her suitcase whose weight dragged at her arm, she caught sight of it in the waiting crowd at the Grand Central Station. The walk from the train through the rough-boarded underground passage had seemed interminable. The station was in turmoil, in the throes of reconstruction. As she followed the crowd with her heavy burden, she realized with annoyance how weak she was still. When she reached John, she dropped her load, fell against him, into his big clumsy arms, and a cry, half sob, half laugh, broke from her.

"Miss Zelda! . . . Why, Miss Zelda! . . . Why, Miss Zelda . . . !"

The same old inarticulate John, but it was good to lean upon his big chest and to feel his encompassing arms about her. She lifted her eyes to smile at him in a moment, and she saw the effect of her altered appearance in his face. Tears misted her vision.

"Ah, John, don't worry about me. I'm all right now."

His thick lips worked with words that did not come, and she remembered her old irritation. The current of dispersing passengers swept to either side, jostling them.

"Let's get out of here, John. Take my suitcase, will you? . . . Boo, how cold it is!"

He spoke of the weather; there had been a severe touch of winter in the city lately, snow and ice. His dis-

tressed eyes every now and then found her wan and wasted face.

"Am I such a fright, John?"

"No, Miss Zelda,—no. You—you'll always be beautiful but you're so—so thin,—so—so kind of sickly looking."

An odd person she must be, she thought. For weeks, months, she had been telling herself that flattery no longer meant anything to her, that she was done with caring what men saw in her, and here she was finding a vague annoyance in old John's honest concern. She knew that she was emaciated, hollow-eyed. Why mind because John looked troubled?

"Well," she said, addressing herself as much as him, "I'm out of prison and back where I belong. You'll see how soon I pick up. . . . Ah, John, you have no idea from what you've rescued me! I touched bottom, John, went just about as low as a person can go. I'm alive to-day, and here to-day because of you——"

"And Madame, too."

"Madame, of course. How is she?"

"About the same. She cannot walk. Only a few steps, you know. And she cannot read nor sew because of her eyes. She sits all day in her chair and worries about what is going wrong upstairs."

"Just what is the matter with her, John?"

"The doctor calls it 'thrombosis,' whatever that means."

"Oh, yes, I know. I haven't been in a hospital for three months without learning something. But oh, John, that hospital! You never will know what hell it was."

"But, Miss Zelda, why didn't you write sooner? Why didn't you let us know about you? Weeks and weeks went by and I got no word. Then my letters began coming back. We had no idea what had happened to you, and I imagined all sorts of terrible things."

"What sort of terrible things, John?" There was a touch of her old mischievousness in the question.

He flushed darkly and his mouth began to reach for words in his embarrassed fashion. It had always been easy to tease John.

"Come on," she said, tugging at his arm. "Let's go home. I want to see Madame. Tell me more about her. What will she want me to do?"

John explained affairs at Boulanger's. As he talked he piloted her from the station to the snow-filled street, but here at his suggestion of a cab, Zelda demurred, insisting upon the street car.

"We can almost walk it," she said, considering the distance, "it's only a few squares."

"No-no, Miss Zelda, you couldn't do it. It's further than you think. You—you—you're not very strong yet."

It was pleasant to have someone concerned for her again.

"Ah, John," she said, patting his hand, "you're an old dear."

His face reddened once more, but she ignored it.

"Listen, John; I suppose it took the last nickel you had to send me that money order."

"Madame put up most of it, and—and then, you know, I have a rich sister."

"Well, whoever put up for it, I want you to know that I'm going to work my fingers to the bone until I pay it back."

"You—you can't do that, Miss Zelda; it was a g-gift. We needed you here. Madame was for kissing me on both cheeks when I suggested you. She was speaking of getting somebody to look after the house, and I mentioned you as a possibility, that was all. . . . But you should have communicated with us long ago. I say 'we'—I mean Madame. I've grown to—to admire her very much. She is—is heroic,—a grand old figure. I see her every afternoon, and we discuss matters. You could have saved us a great deal if you had come sooner. The house is not the same. It hasn't been full since last August and then only for a week or two. You

know how Madame worries. When the Macys left, she wept. It would have broken your heart to have seen her."

"Is Ronnie still there?"

"Oh, no, Ronnie's gone. There's been half a dozen maids since Ronnie went. They steal, Madame says. That's why the Macys left. They missed some jewelry."

"Have you the same room, John, and are you still engaged in your mysterious pursuits behind its locked door?"

The flush and contorted face again.

She squeezed his arm.

"Oh, don't be an old sil', John. Nobody cares a rap what you do. Probably you're making counterfeit money, and the police will raid the place some day, and then we'll find out. . . . Oh, it is good to be back again, John. New York! How I *love* this town! You don't know how I've been longing for it the last few days. I love it, love it, love it! And I've never seen it in snow before. It's beautiful isn't it, John?"

At Sixth Avenue, they changed cars.

"What—what's become of George, Miss Zelda?" her companion asked with embarrassed effort; "where is he now?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. He found another girl to play the sketch with him. But they're not doing the Orpheum any more, or any circuit. I bought a copy of *The Clipper* on the train and I read every word in it from cover to cover, and his name, their team, weren't mentioned."

"Do you . . . does it upset you when you think about him, Miss Zelda?"

His tone brought her quick glance to his face. Poor John! It still mattered to him!

"No, I can't say it does," she said thoughtfully; "I still worry about him, wonder if he needs me, thinks of me and wants me. I know he *does* need me and I'm sure at times he wants me very much, and when I think

of these things, there is an ache here,"—she laid a hand on her heart. "Then I want to go to him, and straighten him out. But that's all I care about George Selby. He's passed out of my life forever, and I never, never want him back in it again under any circumstances. I wish him all the luck and the success and the happiness in the world, but I'm never going back to him. . . . No, John, I want to live my own life now. I have no other ambition but just that. A year ago I had some foolish notions about the footlights, but I don't care about the stage any more. I want to earn my own living, be my own boss and be dependent on nobody. Men—," she paused, shook her head ruefully, and did not finish. "You're the only decent one I've ever known, John," she went on. "I shall always prize your friendship, and always remember how good you've been to me."

§ 2

It was with a beating heart that she stood before Madame Boulanger's brown-stone house with its discordant façade, chipped copings, and lifted her eyes, story by story, to the roof. She followed John up the marred and broken steps her feet had known in her every mood from exuberance to despondency; more than any place she had ever lived in, this old house meant home to her.

She sought its mistress in the low-ceilinged basement room, and here she found Madame in a rocker by the iron-grilled window, a quilt across her knees, a knitted sacque tied with ribbons about her shoulders. A grim, old warrior, she seemed, grizzled, mustached, leather-cheeked, who brought down her thick brows in a heavy frown and folded her lips inwardly in tight compression at sight of Zelda who hurried to her and dropped at her knee. They made little sounds to one another which meant more than words. The smell of garlic clung as of yore to the Frenchwoman, but to Zelda there was

nothing offensive in the odor, and impulsively she kissed the veined, cracked old hand.

"Humph!—not well yet, are you, Mam'selle? When one is sick, one appreciates what it is to be well,—not so? You have suffered much. I see it in your face. And sick too. Ah well, you have come to the right place. Maman Boulanger's is your home. All my children come here to forget, and begin again. Tell me, Mam'selle,—ah, no-no-no,—it is *Madame,* now,—not so?"

"Call me 'Zelda,'" the girl begged.

"*Bien,* my little Zelda,—it has not been well with you?"

"I'm much, much better. Why, just being back in New York has made me feel stronger. You were so kind, so good, Madame, to send for me. I should have died of misery and sickness if I had stayed longer in San Francisco. And I'm going to work for you as you have never had anybody work for you before!"

"All that by and by. Tell me, what of your George, your husband?"

Zelda shook her head.

"I do not know, Madame. I do not know where he is. We disagreed, that was all; we quarrelled and he left me, or to be fair, I left *him,* because he did not want me any more. And then, as you know, I was sick, and was three months in a hospital."

"John, the good fellow, has told me. I know most of what's happened to you; you shall tell me the rest when we have time. But where did you leave John? He came with you, did he not? Why did he not come downstairs with you? Ah, the stupid! Call him, my little one. This room now is like his own; it is his, it is mine, he comes and goes; he is welcome always."

The big man blundered down the narrow dark flight of stairs at Zelda's summons, and immediately set about making chocolate in the diminutive kitchen which adjoined Madame's room. He declined the girl's offer of help, and Madame explained that almost every after-

noon he came to visit her, made the chocolate, sat with her while they drank it, and talked of little else than Zelda herself. While he moved clumsily about the tiny kitchen, Madame with a motion of her head in his direction and an expressive puckering of her lips and eyes, indicated she knew his heart's secret.

The three were munching buttered slices of bread and sipping smoking hot chocolate presently, as Zelda told about the dolors of the hospital.

"I lost my nerve while I was there; it's hard now for me to realize how badly my spirit was broken by those long months of wretchedness. It was a regular chamber of horrors. When Miss Carmody, the head nurse, told me I had to go, I cried like a miserable, whipped child, and begged her not to send me away. She wouldn't listen to me. She said the place wasn't an almshouse and gave me twenty-five cents out of her own pocket. She advised me to apply to the Associated Charities for work. . . . Apply for work!" Zelda paused, a catch in her voice, and moved her head slowly from side to side.

"I don't know," she went on, "perhaps Miss Carmody was right. I wouldn't be here if she hadn't sent me away. Perhaps I was stronger than I thought. I hated every minute I was in the hospital, but I hated the thought of being turned out even more. I guess I must have been sick in my head as well as in my body. Sick in my heart, too," she added forlornly.

She described how, bewildered, frightened, trembling, fearing that at every step she might fall or faint, she had made her way into the city, and had at last reached the headquarters of the charitable organization.

Mr. Gibbons, the secretary, had cross-examined her with bold impertinent questioning when she had applied for funds to help her reach friends in New York, as if in making this request, she was asking him to assist her back to a life of degradation. He wanted to know

what means of self-support she would have when she got to New York, and when she had confessed she was not sure of any but that she believed her friend, Mr. Chapman, would find something for her to do, he had questioned her intimately about John, who he was, what his occupation, how long she had known him, and to what his interest in her amounted.

Weak though she was, Zelda had found enough of her old spirit left, or of one newly born, to grow suddenly impatient of this attitude of suspicion, and next day she had made her way to a telegraph office and had persuaded the clerk to accept a telegram and to send it collect. The answer had been immediate and soul-satisfying. John telegraphed that she was to come to New York at once, a money order to defray all expenses was on its way, and a warm, loving welcome awaited her from Madame Boulanger and himself.

This message, far from routing the suspicions of Mr. Gibbons and his subordinates, had convinced them that she was bent upon returning to a life of sin. Their parting with her had been distinctly curt.

"I could have so easily justified all their fears for me," Zelda had said to herself with a hurt shrug, "by stepping to the nearest telephone and giving Gerry a ring!"

§ 3

Life at Madame Boulanger's soon fell into a routine. Zelda found herself again in her room at the back of the house under the eaves. The old-time lodgers welcomed her pleasantly when they encountered her in the hall or on the stairs, and there were some new faces to which she soon grew accustomed. But the house was less than half full and Zelda saw that it had sadly retrograded under the slipshod care of slatternly colored maids.

Not at any time had it been made clear to her in just what capacity she was to serve Madame, and she had

not particularly cared so long as she was to be useful. She was eager to reëstablish herself in life and the work did not matter. Madame's proposition was that she superintend the maid and the furnace man, rent rooms, take care of the house, and see to the lodgers' wants; for this she was to have her room and ten dollars a week. Zelda eagerly accepted. In some way she did not attempt to explain, the thought of beginning at the bottom and working her way upward, satisfied her. Thoughts of the stage were dim and distant. She had only a remote, detached interest in the theatre, but was passionately eager to prove herself to herself.

The past seemed to belong to someone else. She used to remember old interests, old longings which once had meant much to her, and wondered now how it was she had ever cared. A tenderness for the boy lover of her 'teens still lingered, but of the Doctor and of George she cherished no emotion whatever. They had passed out of her life and with them whatever feelings, good or evil, affectionate or bitter, they had ever aroused in her. Buster of the pert ears and brown, understanding eyes sometimes came to disturb her new indifference, but beyond hoping that somebody loved, petted and looked after him, she was not concerned. The old hirsuted, garlicky Frenchwoman in the basement, John, friendly, sympathetic, devoted, the management of the house, these claimed all her interest in life.

She had changed outwardly as well as inwardly. The raw young beauty was gone which once had mattered so much to her and which had drawn men's eyes wherever she went. At least the healthy, youthful bloom of her cheek, the redness of her lips and the clearness of her eyes were gone. And the extraordinary fact was that now she no longer cared how she looked. Studying her face in the very same mirror in which, a little more than a year before, she had carefully made up preparatory to meeting George or making her calls upon the agencies, it was hard to recognize the girl of those other

days. Her thick mane of hair had returned to its lustreless yellow; her eyes were set in shadowy sockets and her cheek bones were well defined. The gaiety that had always lurked in her face, the ready smile, had been replaced by calm gravity, and there was sobriety, discipline in her expression. Her skin, always flawless, had taken on an almost ethereal quality. Smiles parted her lips less readily than of yore; she bore a look of aloofness; the stamp of illness, of frailty clung to her.

There was much that had to be done in the house; certain rooms needed a thorough cleaning if not complete renovation,—new furniture, new window shades, new curtains,—towels had worn thin and were full of holes,—there was a shortage of sheets,—blankets wanted mending and cleaning, a plumber was generally required,—and in more than one place the roof leaked. She was eager to have all these deficiencies rectified as much for her own satisfaction as to please Madame, who knew of them, imagined them worse than they were, and fumed because she was chained to her chair unable to attend to them herself.

Slowly Zelda was able to bring a semblance of order and management into the demoralized establishment, and slowly she grew to rely upon a new strength that did not desert her in moments when she needed it. Madame Boulanger was often complaining and fretful but her moments of fault finding did not disturb her assistant. Zelda was glad she was fond of the old woman, and took a keen pleasure in having a reassuring answer ready to meet her querulous questions. She enjoyed looking after the Frenchwoman too, in a personal way. Madame could not do much more than dress herself and hobble with slow, shuffling steps from chair to bed and back again. Zelda prepared what little food she ate and more often than not shared these meals with her. John joined them in the late afternoons but it was Zelda now who had the chocolate ready, and hot toasted crumpets or lady-fingers to serve with it.

Big John, clumsy, elephantine, would sit in one of Madame's modest sized chairs, his knees almost at the level of his chin, his broad shoulders bent, his enormous, thick fingers handling the frail china cup, stirring its smoking contents with a small silver spoon! Ludicrous, ridiculous, and yet appealing. Zelda might smile at the picture, but it was a smile tinged with tenderness.

A pathetic figure, she found this leviathan of a man who loved her so apologetically and patiently, who asked only to be tolerated, and serve her. She had but to lift a finger to have him start off blunderingly, unquestioningly to execute her wish. Good, kind, gentle, yet somehow there was no place in the world for John Chapman. His huge clumsy body, his halting articulation and the slow processes of his brain hid the timid, poetical soul of an artist.

Soon after she took over the management of the house, she learned his secret. Big John Chapman painted on china, painted place-cards for dinner parties, birthday and Christmas cards! His work was far from bad, but the man himself was acutely ashamed of it. Mostly he did porcelain painting,—beer steins, on which appeared jolly monks in warm sepia tones, fat friars, rosy and genial with goblets of wine in their hands, tonsured heads and jovial ecclesiastical faces in cowl and smock winking slyly from beneath their hoods. Vases too, he decorated,—pitchers and plates, festooned with clusters of pink and red roses,—and glassware, perfume bottles, liqueur decanters with intricate gold beading and conventional designs. The white porcelain steins, the plates, vases and glassware, he purchased at a wholesale importer's far down town, brought them to his room in a bulky black valise, to embellish behind his locked door, and then, one by one, carried them to a furnace to be baked, and finally, if they did not crack during the process, to a dealer who sometimes paid him outright for his work and sometimes sold it on commission. John lived on the

small sums this man advanced him. He confessed to Zelda, when she pointedly put the question, that it was probable the dealer underpaid him, but he was far too heavily in debt to him to open negotiations with anyone else.

§ 4

The cold weather passed and the first indications of spring were upon the city before Zelda realized winter had gone. Behind the house was a small yard which still gave evidence that a garden had once flourished there. Old flower beds ranged fence and house and here and there fragments of cement indicated that walks had once bordered them. Just outside the grilled windows of Madame's basement room, a bare bush had lifted its black stalks nakedly to the sky all winter long, and Zelda, gazing forth one day upon the familiar prospect of the yard, suddenly noticed that the bush had changed.

"Look, Madame," she cried, "something's happened to the bush."

The Frenchwoman, shuffling slowly, painfully toward the rocking-chair that Zelda held for her, sniffed derisively.

"It is the spring, imbecile. April is here. We shall have warm weather soon."

"April already!" Zelda gazed, round-eyed, at the green buds that dotted the black stalks and observed that these were black no longer, but brown, reddish brown, and swollen with sap. Up to a glimpse of blue, her eyes lifted, and she realized the sun was shining, filling the city with warmth and cheer. In their cages Madame's canary birds twittered pertly and brown sparrows hopped and pecked industriously at the hard ground outside.

CHAPTER III

§ 1

THERE came a brisk knock at the door.

"It's Miranda, Mis' Marsh. Lady to see about rooms."

Zelda waited until the maid's footsteps had receded.

"It's all I do 'round here now," she said to Madame Boulanger, as she whirled remnants of ice about at the bottom of her glass and drained the diluted dregs. "Miranda does everything else. She's a marvel. I don't see why you don't raise her wages and let me find another job."

"Tsst!" Madame ejaculated with a rebuking gesture.

"It's nearly a year since I've been here; things are running all right now, and I feel superfluous."

"What foolishness you talk!"

"No, it is not foolishness," Zelda asserted, rising and kissing the Frenchwoman's coarse gray hair. "You rent your own rooms; you do that better than I can. Miranda's capable of everything else, and if you pay her a decent wage she won't leave you."

"But it is you that wants to leave! Maman Boulanger tires you, heh? The woman has become a talkative, complaining old invalid, not so?"

"No-no-no-no! You know that is not so. You're being bad, now—very bad, and I shan't love you any more."

Zelda pretended high dudgeon as she left the room, but on the stairs as she went up to meet the caller, she thought that Madame in a measure was right; she did want to leave, not the house of course, but she needed an occupation that held more interest for her.

In the hallway, a tall, handsome, well dressed young

woman was waiting. At once Zelda recognized the actress type.

"Madame Boulanger——" began the visitor, then hesitated.

"I'm her housekeeper," Zelda said.

"I'm looking for a room. Can you take care of me for two or three weeks, perhaps longer? I'm an old patron here. Chamberlain's my name, Miss Nina Chamberlain; Madame Boulanger will remember me, I'm sure."

"Nina!" cried Zelda.

The other searched her face in the none too certain hallway light.

"You remember me!" Zelda eagerly continued. "Zelda Marsh? We were with the Meserves together."

"My *dear!*" Nina caught her former friend in her arms. "It's been perfect ages. . . ."

"Yes, I know."

"You've changed. Mercy, I don't think I should have known you! . . . You haven't been living here ever since?"

"Oh, no; much has happened. I've had my ups and downs. And you?"

"I had to stay home last winter. A stock engagement this summer. Back here now after the elusive job once more. You've given up the stage?"

"I've been sick, and I've been helping Madame Boulanger with the house since I returned to New York. She hasn't been well either and I've been lending a hand. I haven't looked for a job."

"It's a tough game. Last season was dreadful; I didn't land a thing. . . . Oh, my dear! I've such a lot to talk to you about!"

"You're coming here, aren't you?"

"If you have room for me?"

"No single ones, but I've a fine double one on the second floor. I'll show you."

§ 2

Nina stirred the embers of old fires that Zelda had thought would never blaze again. The next day when she arrived with bags and baggage, Zelda showed her to her room, returned in a quarter of an hour, spent the rest of the afternoon with her, rejoined her when she came in after an evening's engagement and talked until the streaks of dawn sent her, conscience stricken, to bed. They met again the following morning, went forth toward noon in search of food, and the remaining hours of the day passed all too quickly in each other's company.

Madame was in a fine fit of jealousy when Zelda came in at tea time, and nothing the girl could do or say succeeded in shaking the old woman out of her silent, sullen mood. What little conversation there was passed between Zelda and John. The Frenchwoman's displeasure distressed Zelda, but she could not bring herself to shorten by so much as a minute her intercourse with this friend of former years, who of all the women she had ever known, came nearest to her in mind and taste.

Nina was going back on the stage. She had been to see Dean Farquharson and was to read for him the following week; Phinelander had promised her a good part in a road show if nothing better turned up, Norman Carruth and Ralph Martingale, with both of whom she had come to be on very friendly terms during the summer stock engagement, wanted her to meet this person and that,—an author, a manager, a director, a composer; she was being invited to one gay party after another where important personages in the theatrical profession invariably seemed to be present.

So it appeared to Zelda. Nina returned from a luncheon, an interview, an after the theatre supper with glowing tales of contacts with celebrities and personal triumphs. That these accounts were embroidered some-

what by Nina's imagination, Zelda was ready to believe. She was only too ready to believe it, for, to her shame, —and this she felt very keenly,—she was envious. Certain details of Nina's recitals had all the appearance of truth, and, besides, there was Nina herself to give the tales an air of probability. She had changed from the slim, schoolgirlish companion with whom Zelda had so often shared dressing and hotel room, and had grown into a dashing, beautiful woman, heavier, more mature, self-assured, even more intelligent and cultivated. Zelda both admired and disapproved of her. One moment she seemed everything that she, Zelda, desired most to be; and at another, the housekeeper of Madame Boulanger considered her life an empty sham and she herself certain of failure. But Nina was handsome, Nina dressed well, Nina was sought after, and undeniably was having a wonderfully good time. Already she had refused several good engagements which Zelda thought her mad to decline; she was waiting for a Broadway job, she said, and there was every likelihood that she would get it.

Zelda wrestled with herself these days; she fought hard to tear up by the roots the longings that sprouted like weeds in her heart. Since she had come back to New York, and had been occupied with the affairs of the house, with looking after Madame's wants and admiring John's pretty handiwork, she had known peace of mind, had been satisfied with her days, feeling that she was gaining in strength and composure and winning for herself a new philosophy of life. She had known, of course, that this could not continue indefinitely; new interests were certain to intrude and before long she would again be swept into the maelstrom of living. But she was not ready for the change yet; she wanted another six months, another year, before the quiet order of her existence need be disrupted. In any case, not by the stage, she vehemently told herself,—no, not the stage, where all was pretense,

display, where petty jealousies, prejudices, rivalries, made for bitterness and heartache, where success came by accident or favoritism,—not the stage, which meant the agencies again, the dreary round of calls, up the stairs, up the elevators to the crowded, hot waiting rooms where the nervous, motley group gathered, anxious, hiding its pride, hoping against hope, —no, not the stage,—never the stage——

But of a sudden here it was upon her, the yearning for grease paint and footlights, the longing for gas flares and rehearsals, the hunger for applause that could sweep an audience like the hot rush of flame across a grass field,—here it was and not to be denied.

§ 3

Upon an evening three days later, she rustled downstairs to Nina's room in borrowed finery, her heart beating with more excitement than she had known for a year. It was ten o'clock; the party, Nina had said, would not begin before eleven-thirty. Norman Carruth and his wife were entertaining, an after the theatre affair, and Nina had asked permission to bring Zelda. But persuading her friend to accompany her had been quite another matter. Zelda had raised one objection after another: she had nothing to wear, she did not feel like going, Madame Boulanger would be cross with her for days.

Nina routed one argument after another, defeating the one of no clothes by offering to let Zelda wear a new frock that had just come home from a shop. Her warmth and enthusiasm were irresistible. Oh, it was going to be a splendid party, and Zelda was certain to have a good time, everybody worth while was to be there, Norman Carruth was a darling,—a terrible old flirt, but Zelda was sure to adore him,—Ralph Martingale had promised to call for them, and he was another "heart breaker" and she was "mad" to have him know Zelda and Zelda to know him! Too much for

the wistful, hungry hearted housekeper of Madame Boulanger. With a pulse racing like a débutante's, and little delightful tremors running up and down her spine, she agreed to go.

Now she knocked timidly on Nina's door. It opened immediately and Nina stood revealed in long, green clinging silk, low cut, veils of chiffon cascading over her white bare arms, her hair piled high,—a beautiful woman, a superb woman, animated, vivacious, abounding in vitality.

But Nina had no thought of her own appearance as she stood under the ugly, flaring gas light and gazed at the girl upon the threshold. Zelda's gown was black and gold, a shining satin that defined the figure and trailed upon the floor, gold lace across the breast, and a gold tassel that dangled from a golden girdle. The dress hung somewhat loosely upon her thin figure but she knew it was becoming and was pleased at the instant look of satisfaction in its owner's eyes.

"Lovely, my dear, lovely," Nina said judiciously. She peered critically at Zelda's face and hair. "Only you haven't got *half* enough make-up on, and the way you do your hair is the extension of the limit. You never *did* know how to do your hair. Sit right down here; let's see what I can do with it. I've always wanted to get my hands on this mop of yours; it's one of your best points and you make nothing of it."

For several minutes she was busy with rouge pad and mascaro, darkening Zelda's eyes beneath her lashes. Next she whipped out the pins that held the tawny mane in place, brought it tumbling about Zelda's ears, brushed vigorously, then gathered it in both hands, held it high and with a quick motion folded it over and over upon itself; for a minute or two she pushed and pulled it into place; then pinned, and crimped vagrant strands with a hot iron.

"That's better at any rate," she declared, gazing at Zelda's reflection in the mirror.

Zelda looked too. It was indeed "better." She brought her face close to the glass. Nina was clever. The make-up, while obvious, was amazingly effective. She stood up, getting a full-length reflection of herself, and with the vision came a clutch at her heart. Yes, she also was beautiful,—beautiful as Nina,—a different type of course, but beautiful none the less. Beautiful for a night, she thought. Ah, what difference did it make as long as it was to-night! Nothing new for her to consider herself beautiful; she had held that comforting opinion often enough in days not so long ago, but there was a difference, she realized, between the austere, serene beauty that now looked back at her from the mirror, and the bold, blond haired, red cheeked buxom type she had cultivated in the days of the Golden West Hotel. There was a dignity about this new beauty; her face had thinned, but there had come to it a look of reserve, refinement, almost an ethereal quality.

As she gazed at herself, it suddenly came to her that Nina had not done her justice; Nina had overdone the rouging and the shadows. Warm cheeks and darkened eyes were common attributes, but serenity and cool dignity were qualities every woman did not possess. In that moment, Zelda caught a glimpse into the future and saw the kind of woman she wanted to be and to appear. Dignity, reserve. The words whipsawed through her brain. Dignity and reserve; they were already in her soul; she needed but to dress the part. Black and gold were all well enough for one evening, the high blush on temple and cheek bone, the darkened lids, the brilliant lips, would do for to-night; but the knowledge of how to achieve the beauty that was to be hers in the years to come was singing in her heart, and throwing one of Nina's evening wraps about her shoulders, jubilantly she followed her down to the hallway below where Ralph Martingale was waiting.

§ 4

It was a gay throng that met her eye from the entrance of the Carruths' drawing room. One or two well-known faces Zelda picked out of the crowd immediately: Cecil Graupner with his British flowing blond mustache, Dean Farquharson, hollow cheeked, aquiline of nose, scraggly of beard, and—with a little tightening in her throat,—Tarabochia, the Italian whom Chris Greggains had brought over and who was singing at the Manhattan. Ralph Martingale guided his companions to Stella Carruth who was pleasantly cordial, and in another moment Zelda was gazing into the dark, flirtatious eyes of Norman, Stella's husband. She found him everything Nina had predicted, a fascinating scoundrel with beautiful black eyebrows that twitched with every expression of his face, full sensuous lips and gray hair that curled like ruffled bird wings just above his ears. He bent his dark eyes on Zelda, the lashes trembling ever so slightly, his brows wrinkling, but she turned indifferently away to follow Nina and be presented to Mrs. Carruth's elderly mother, and was still unmoved to find him presently beside her.

The rooms filled rapidly. Among other late arrivals, Zelda placed lovely Billie Vaughan, and Gilbert Sims, the playwright, and just after midnight with the stir she always managed to create whenever she made an entrance, Anna Fernandez, older and plumper than when Zelda had last seen her, but dashing, superb, magnificent, nevertheless. Tray loads of champagne and sandwiches were borne in by waiters, the babble of voices increased, the laughter of women, the bass rumble of men, groups formed, disintegrated, reformed; Norman Carruth at her elbow murmuring:

"Where have you been hiding? Why haven't I seen or heard of you?"

"I presume that's my misfortune," she rejoined with a cool smile.

"Ah, you're making fun of me. I'm in earnest. The misfortune's mine, of course. I've—I've missed something; I've missed knowing *you.* Tell me, what do you do?"

"Oh, I work for my living."

"Of course. I mean, do you sing or act? What show are you in?"

"I'm a housekeeper of a lodging house in the West Forties, patronized mostly by members of your profession, Mr. Carruth."

His eyes narrowed, studying her sharply. Some of his urbanity deserted him as it slowly broke upon him that she spoke the truth. Ralph Martingale and Nina were beckoning and Zelda held out her hand to be rescued.

"Glad to show you our best rooms, Mr. Carruth, if you're interested in anything like that in our part of town," she said banteringly. He scowled frankly in answer, his eyes following her as she crossed the room. It would be but a little while, she knew, before she would hear his voice again.

A woman with a familiar carriage stood with her back toward her. Zelda looked again at the tangle of bronze red curls, the filament of gold that bound the hair, the trailing draperies, the long, gesturing white arms, jangling with bracelets. She caught Nina's wrist.

"Isn't that Ned?" she whispered breathlessly.

"Sure, that's Ned."

Zelda moved toward this friend of the past, her heart quickening. Ned turned, glanced into her face, turned away again. Zelda stood her ground, smiling recognition. Back came Ned's eyes caught by the smile, then swiftly the change of expression, surprise, pleasure; out flew the actress's hands, with an exclamation:

"Ahhh—you, ahhh! *Goodness!* Why, it's my little Frisco pick-up!"

"Zelda Marsh," the girl prompted, happily.

"Zelda Marsh, of course! My dear, I'm *so* glad to

see you! Why haven't you been to see me, you bad girl? And no reply to my letters! I've a good mind not to speak to you. I heard you married that Selby boy, and Henry and I wanted to send you a telegram and some sort of remembrance and we hadn't the faintest idea how to reach you! I needn't ask you how you are, you look glorious,—a bit more serious in the face, I think, but it's *most* becoming. How is your romantic George?"

"I know no more than you. We've separated, I'm sorry to say."

"Ah, what a pity! I hoped you two would hit it off. What are you doing?"

"Oh, the usual thing."

"Not located yet?"

"No, not yet, I've a job helping a friend manage a lodging house, but I've decided to try the stage again. They say once you rub grease paint on your face, you're infected for life."

"It's true. Come and see me to-morrow at, say, ten-thir—say eleven o'clock. We're at the Manhattan, a vile old place; I wish they'd tear it down. I'll try to remember to tell them to let you come up, but if I forget, you insist, understand? Don't let them send you away. Oh, I want to hear about everything, and all that's happened to you. *Everything.* Henry'll be glad to see you too. He didn't come to-night; he never does, you know, to this sort of thing——" She leaned closer. "—Dreadful, isn't it?" Aloud: "Well, my dear, to-morrow without fail. Ten-thirty,—no, I said eleven. Mammy won't let the Lord Almighty disturb me before eleven. . . . Oh yes, Mammy's still with me. Blessed old darling, isn't she? We'll have reams to talk. . . . Say, Pick-up mine, you've got a kind of distinguished air about you now that I don't remember you had before. It's that something-out-of-the-ordinary that counts in this profession. I don't know exactly what it is, but cultivate it. Oh, here's the ubiquitous Norman! You

know Miss Marsh, don't you, Norman,—Zelda Marsh? She's a protegée of mine. I picked her up in San Francisco and I'm going to make a great actress of her some day."

Norman Carruth smiled sardonically.

"She's one already. A moment ago, she almost made me believe she was a housekeeper or something."

§ 5

Like Cinderella, Zelda stood shorn of her glory the next morning. No make-up now, no shadowy eyes, no brilliantly touched cheeks, no cleverly dressed hair, no satin gown of black and gold. She was the housekeeper again in a plain, dark blue coat and skirt, high-necked, fresh white shirtwaist, plain straw hat. Her hair was brushed and braided as she customarily wore it, her dark, quiet eyes looked forth from unstained lids and from lashes free of paint. No artifice to-day to hide the look that hurt and suffering had bequeathed her.

On her way down to the street, she stopped at Nina's door. Nina, yawning, groaning, stumbled sleepily to unlock it, then stumbled back to bed. She eyed Zelda drowsily, blinking at her with painful effort.

"Oh, Gawd,—oh, merciful Gawd!" she protested in an agony between wakefulness and sleep.

Zelda explained briefly the appointment she had for the morning. Nina opened her eyes wide for an instant and stared at her with a sharp scowl.

"Why go looking like a school marm?" she demanded. "Why not wear some of my duds? You know how nutty Ned is about clothes. Put on that plaid coat of mine anyhow, for Gawd's sake."

"No, Nina, never again. Last night was different. It was a kind of fancy dress party for me and I loved every minute of it. But that wasn't I. I'm going to be myself, my own self in this game, and if I go back on the stage, it will be the real Zelda Marsh and no coun-

terfeit. I've thought it all out, Nina, and I'm convinced I'm right. It will make more of an important impression on Ned if she sees me looking like this than if I doll up in the best there is."

§ 6

But half an hour later as she stood before Olivia Meserve in her hotel room where she lay in bed amid a score of dainty lace, beribboned pillows, nibbling her toast and sipping her coffee from the breakfast tray across her lap, Zelda was not so sure.

The welcoming smile had slowly, ever so slowly, faded after Ned had kissed her and Zelda had seated herself at her friend's behest close beside the bed. In its place had come a puzzled look, and the girl noted the swiftly roving eyes taking in the details of her face and costume.

"You've changed a great deal, haven't you, my dear? I can see you've had a tough time of it; your face shows it. Been sick, haven't you? Ahhh, I'm sorry. I didn't notice it last night, but anyway last night I was dazzled. Oh yes, my dear, you were really stunning last night. Everybody was commenting about you, asking me who you were. I was really very proud to tell them. You had Norman quite dotty. I think Stella was truly worried for the first time in years. You ought to go 'round and see her this morning and set the poor creature's heart at rest."

"Meaning I look so dowdy to-day?" Zelda asked good naturedly. Ned flushed. She was not usually caught in a clumsy speech.

"I mean nothing of the kind. But last night you were radiant. I was quite taken off my feet, and I've been waiting to tell Henry, but of course, I haven't seen him since. Well, what about you? Nina Chamberlain,—my, she's blossomed out, hasn't she?—tells me you've given up the stage. I don't blame you. It takes great

personality to get anywhere on the stage. In the long run, you'll be better off if you do anything else."

Not the kind of encouragement for which Zelda had hoped. She said with effort:

"I was thinking of trying it again."

"Oh, my dear, don't. Stick to whatever you're doing, —I forget what it is,—but if it means bread-and-butter don't give it up, for the stage."

Zelda pressed her lips slowly together and frowned at her clasped hands. Ned went on talking of her own plans. Henry had a new play, he had been over to London during the summer and had purchased the American rights, a comedy by Blum, the English playwright; they were going to produce it early in September, Henry was busy casting it now, they would open in Hartford probably and bring it into New York at once,—just as soon as they got it in shape.

"You know how those things are," Ned said, reaching for a cigarette, "you can't tell a thing about them. The play reads well, heaven knows how it will act; Henry likes it, but I've no faith in it. There's nothing in it for me; it's all talky-talk, the way Blum writes. Well, tell me about yourself, what happened to you and the Selby boy?"

Zelda described their marriage, and the adventure in vaudeville. She did not feel in a confiding mood. Last night had been different. There had been cordiality in her meeting with Ned; now she felt the actress's interest had waned, her mind wandered easily to other things, there were interruptions.

"Mammy, save the newspaper,—don't let the waiter take it away. . . . Go on, my dear; there's an article by the foolish Sun critic I want to glance at again. You got to San Francisco,—what happened then? You didn't see anything of our friend, Grosbeck, did you?"

The story of her trials and tribulations with George continued, but Zelda felt it was a dull chronicling. In

the adjoining room the telephone rang; Mammy came in and whispered to her mistress.

"Oh, my dear!" Ned exclaimed, "I *must* answer this. Tell them to put him on in here."

Then into the telephone:

"You didn't! . . . Well, what did she *say*? . . . I shouldn't have told her. . . . No, indeed I shouldn't. . . . It was none of her business. . . . Oh, delicious—delicious. . . ."

On and on with pauses while Ned listened smiling, her eyes sparkling. Zelda stared out of the window—roofs, roofs, ugly stacks, spires, towering office buildings, all unlovely, hideous, menacing.

A long box of roses arrived. An enigmatic smile on Ned's face as she read the card and tore it into small bits.

"You were saying?" she said with a fresh smile to Zelda.

"Oh, I'd finished," Zelda replied amiably, "that was all there was to it. And I must be going."

"Oh, my *dear*! You mustn't think of it! Why, I want a long, long talk with you. It's positively been ages since I've seen you, and I want to hear what you're *doing*. You haven't told me a word,—where you're living or anything!"

"Well, it's not important. I'm temporarily helping a friend; she has a house in which she rents rooms, and the poor thing's been sick."

"You always were good hearted. But tell me, do you ever do any more of your imitations? I shall never forget the night you took off Henry in one of his tantrums. Oh, my dear, I laugh whenever I think of it. I remind him still of 'Do you want me to leave the thea—tre?' You caught his manner and his tone perfectly. Oh, my dear, how I laughed!"

"I don't remember it," Zelda said trying to recall the incident.

"You don't?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Well, you're an extraordinary girl. I shall be grateful to you to the end of my days for what you did for me on that horrible, horrible trip. I think you saved my reason; I really think you did. Henry and I were at swords' points, you know; he wasn't making money,—losing it in fact,—and the road always upsets me. Henry says I'm a totally different person when I'm touring. Well, God help us, I hope Blum's ridiculous play, 'Jenny Scrubs the Floor,'—isn't it the most absurd name you ever heard? And he won't change it either! —keeps us at home for awhile. I'm sick of living in trunks. If we go out of town, you'll *have* to come along. I'll talk to Henry and make him find you something or other. You were the greatest comfort on that trip; I shall never forget it. . . . Who *is* it, Mammy? Gracious, how you scared me! Come in, Henry; it's only Miss Marsh in here; you remember Zelda, of course."

Mr. Meserve came in, handsome, vigorous, broad-shouldered, perhaps a little grayer, a little heavier in feature. Zelda had always been afraid of him, although admiring him. In the small hotel bedroom cluttered with feminine apparel and trinkets, he loomed enormously. She rose to depart, but Meserve held her hand, detaining her.

"Hey, hey, hey, what's all the hurry, Zelda? No need of your dashing off just because I've arrived. It's been —my God, it's two years, isn't it, Ned, since we went to California?—How've you been?"

"She married that Selby boy. You remember the romantic scamp we had so much trouble with?" Ned said. "They got married and tried vaudeville and when they got to Frisco, they had a split and he just went off and abandoned her."

"T-t-t-t, he didn't have very much to him, I'm afraid," Henry said, his eyes not moving from Zelda's

face. "You've had a rough time of it, I imagine. No good, was he?"

"Oh, he treated her shamefully," Ned broke in, again.

"And what are you doing now?" Meserve asked.

"Oh, she's given up the stage," Ned continued to answer for her; "she says she's never going back to it. That's what I advise her——"

"For heaven's sake, shut *up,* will you, Ned, and let the girl speak for herself."

Zelda laughed and told her tale as briefly as possible.

"But Ned's not altogether right," she finished, "I haven't decided to give up the stage; I've been thinking very seriously of trying it again. I don't know. It seems the thing I've *got* to do."

"Oh, she makes up beautifully, Henry," Ned impulsively cut in; "you should have seen her last night. She was really quite stunning. That man Carruth —you know what a Don Juan he thinks he is!—went completely off his head about her. Don't judge her by the way she looks to-day. Give her a chance with some good clothes and a mirror——"

Meserve turned upon his wife and silenced her with an exaggerated expression of boredom.

"Do you mind taking off your hat?" he asked Zelda. She complied, and he went to the window, raised the shade, and studied her face in the strong light.

"Now the other side," he directed. He surveyed her from one angle, then from another.

"As I remember it," he said, continuing to examine her from between narrowed lids, "you were always rather amenable to suggestion. We got along first rate, didn't we?"

"Why, I believe so," Zelda answered, wonderingly.

"You could do dialect too, as I recall it."

"Well, I don't know, I never tried anything very difficult."

"Did you ever try Cockney?"

"I don't know exactly what 'Cockney' is."

"English, as a low class Londoner would speak it, servant girl type, working woman, that sort. A Cockney is a Londoner of the slums, an East Ender, 'born within the sound of Bow Bells'; that's the definition, I believe."

"Well, I could try."

"And you're willing to work hard?"

"Y-yes."

"*Very* hard?"

"Oh yes, I'm not afraid of work."

"Day and night, hey?"

"Surely,—day and night."

Henry turned to Ned.

"I guess our quest's over. . . . if she'll work."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"She's the type, isn't she? Just what we've been hunting for? A woman who's been knocked about,—got lots of sadness and pathos in her face; a woman with a hunger for something she's been cheated out of? I tell you, Ned, she's made to order; she's just what we want."

"Want for what?" his wife cried. "I haven't the ghost of a notion what you're talking about!"

"Why, for 'Jenny'!"

"'Jenny' *who*?"

"Why, 'Jenny' who scrubs the floor!—you idiot!"

CHAPTER IV

§ 1

JENNY: Hit eyent for the likes o' me, your worship. Hi'm honly a common slut, Hi ham.

NILES: I don't like to hear you calling yourself names, Jenny.

JENNY: Well, that's wot 'e calls me, sir.

NILES: Then I certainly think he ought to be locked up.

JENNY: No-no, sir, not 'im! 'E's a man, sir.

NILES: What's that got to do with it?

JENNY: Well, sir, beggin' your pardon, to my way o' thinkin', hit's like this: Halmighty God never hintended the men o' this world should work. Hit's the femiles does the work, an' right an' proper, say Hi. The miles looks 'arnsom an' does their bloomin' duty. That's the wy 'E planned hit. You know, sir, hall this talk habout us women bein' the best lookin', hit don't 'old water. Hit's the miles that be's the 'arnsomer o' the two. Now take the lion, the rooster, the peacock, hall them furry an' feathery cree-ters, eyent hit so, the 'e's 'arnsomer than the 'er? The 'ippopotamuses an' the helephants, for hall I know's, the sime. Now has for Jimes, 'e can call me wot 'e likes. 'E's a man, an', savin' your presence, a 'arnsom one. Hi'm only the char woman, an' Hi scrubs the floor 'ere mornin' an' night, an' Hi minds my business. . . .

§ 2

"The character of Jenny takes the place of a sort of Greek chorus; her speeches, subtly couched in Mr. Blum's fine humor, voice the author's comments on the situations in the drama as

it progresses. Capably entrusted to an actress, who as far as we can learn is a newcomer to the boards,—one Zelda Marsh, —'Jenny' becomes a most vivid and appealing character. . . ."

"Praise unstinted and undiluted must be accorded Miss Marsh for her fine, intelligent interpretation of the minor rôle of 'Jenny.' Minor, however, is a misnomer, as the play eddies about this wistful character whose enchanting observations throughout the action of the play are largely responsible for the audience's delighted laughter."

". . . and one must not omit mention of Zelda Marsh who amply justified Mr. Meserve's selection as the scrubwoman who cleans the floor while the play progresses. We find her assiduously scouring as the curtain rises, she comes and goes with her pails, brooms and rags, and as the curtain descends, she is once more at her task, 'minding her business,' a precept she offers which if the others of Mr. Blum's characters had observed, we should have had no play and no thoroughly enjoyable evening's entertainment."

". . . Not to be discounted in summing up the contributing factors to last evening's success, is the appealing voice and face of Miss Zelda Marsh, who played the character of 'Jenny' herself. I do not know what experience Miss Marsh has had, but she is, in this reviewer's opinion, a fine, capable actress and one who should go far in her profession before she's done with it."

"Among Mr. Meserve's laurels should be included the casting of Zelda Marsh as the loquacious 'Jenny,' for she admirably and touchingly handles a part which in less capable hands might easily have been sentimental and banal."

"In the language of the Rialto, a hitherto unheard-of young actress, by name, Zelda Marsh, 'runs away with the show' at the Lyceum. Mr. Blum's subtleties may or may not please 'the million'; Henry Meserve's enunciation may or may not be understood; the histrionic abilities of his good wife, Olivia, may or may not be a subject for debate, but it is safe to predict that the theatre-going public of this city will place its unqualified approval upon Zelda Marsh's delightful and thoroughly satisfying handling of the rôle of 'Jenny' who scrubs the floor."

§ 3

Nina brought her the papers as early as nine o'clock, her arms full of them. She had risen early, and sallied forth to the corner newsstand to purchase them, had carried them up the four flights to Zelda's room, only to discover to her disgust that John had been before her, and that the bed was cascading with them, and Zelda herself with head against her pillow, her hands idle in her lap, was gazing a little flushed and a little bewildered about her, her lips touched with a hint of smile.

"Oh, I haven't seen them—I haven't read a word!" Nina burst forth. "Are they good? Are they good? Oh, Zelda, I can't wait,—*tell me!*"

She seized an open paper off the bed, slid into a chair and began to read.

§ 4

"It's mo' flowers, Mis' Marsh." Miranda at the door. "And heah's a telegram—free of them."

"Let's have the wires, Miranda, and the card, but take the flowers down to Madame's room. Tell her I'll be there directly,—and take her these newspapers. . . . You don't want the ones you brought, do you, Nina? Ask Madame to save them."

She opened the telegrams.

My heartiest congratulations on your notable success.
Norman Carruth.

Proud to know you, Zelda. Make them boost your salary.
William S. Winship.

Have a splendid opportunity for you immediately or when you are at liberty. Do let me call and see you. I know I have something that will interest you. Congratulations on your success.

Margaret Shields Bryan.

Zelda frowned a moment over the last name. Then a quick vision came to her: an office door, a frosted panel of glass and on the glass in bold black letters: "Mrs. Bryan's Theatrical Employment Agency."

The card bore Henry Meserve's neatly engraved name,—a pen through this,—and in his fine handwriting across its face:

So much of last night's success is due entirely to you. Congratulations and many thanks. The notices this morning are no more than what you deserve. I knew all along you were going to set them talking and it's a satisfaction to find my opinion justified. I think we're in for a run.

H. M.

§ 5

Glorious! Soul satisfying!

Zelda opened wide the windows and doors of her starved heart and let the golden sunshine of approval and success come streaming in. It warmed her as nothing had ever warmed her. She felt the comforting, genial glow penetrating to the very marrow of her bones.

"Something will happen and spoil it all," she thought, "and I'll go back to being what I've always been. . . ."

"I'm there at last!"—this fervently and with clasped hands—"by everything I hold dear in this world, by all the strength of my body and soul, I *won't* throw it away, I won't let it turn my head!"

Interesting, amusing, too often distressing, was the effect of her success among her friends and acquaintances.

Ned Meserve made little effort to disguise her irritation. The leading feminine rôle, if the play could be said to have one, was hers, but the best part was undeniably the scrubwoman's, a characterization which Ned could not possibly have attempted. "Jenny" completely overshadowed her "Lady Melrose." She could

look neither kindly upon the play nor upon the exaltation of her late protegée.

Her husband's enthusiasm amply compensated Zelda for the loss of Ned's fickle patronage. Henry smiled upon her, flattered her, deferred to her. He welcomed her into the charmed circle of his friendship, and Henry Meserve's friendship was not to be despised. There was nothing insincere about this new regard. She had brought him profit, it was true, but Zelda felt he liked her for herself. On her part, she admired him inordinately, he was a great director, he had "made" her. She knew she would feel gratefully loyal to him for the rest of her life. She signed a new contract with him immediately; he agreed to pay her a hundred dollars a week. A few of her friends urged her to hold out for more, but she was satisfied; a month earlier, she told them and told herself, she would have gladly accepted a quarter of that sum.

Nina's pleasure did not continue to be as enthusiastic as her early ardor had seemed to promise. She had been quite sincere in wanting Zelda to find a good part, and she had made more than one honest effort to help her, but the unqualified success that had suddenly come to her friend was a little more than she could accept with a good grace. The green-eyed monster now and then showed the painful gleam of his glance. Nina could not help it, nor did Zelda wholly blame her, but it made for coldness between the two and all the friendly overtures from Zelda were construed as condescensions by her less fortunate companion.

Madame Boulanger alternately gloried and gloomed over her housekeeper's change of fortunes. She was vociferous in sounding Zelda's praises, but grumbled and tossed her head whenever the girl came near her or attempted to show affection.

"Pffff! It is the end," she would say, breathing audibly through her nose, hugging herself in a way she had when provoked. "We help the children over the

bad spots and once they are on ground safe and sure,—poof! off they go! Tsst, hush your chatter! Maman Boulanger knows. They come and go, these children of mine, but the ones that make the big hit, *they* do not come again. I know, I know. I am very proud of you, my little Zelda. You have made this old heart of mine very happy. Always I have said that you would go to the very top. The good God will bear witness I have said so. But you will forget old ugly Madame Boulanger when you are rich and you have the grand carriage and the servants——"

"No, no, no, never," Zelda would insist, kissing her leathery, wrinkled cheek, and she knew that no matter what life held in store for her, there would never be anyone to take the place in her affections of this crotchety, complaining, old Frenchwoman.

A horde of new friends sprang up about her overnight, most of them honest, well intentioned, who truly wanted to know her better and to have her like them. Ralph Martingale, Norman Carruth, even his wife, Stella, were among these. Carruth possibly felt some warmer emotion for her, but this was a passing fancy,—he was an impressionable, romantic person,—and Zelda felt she need not concern herself; in any case, it had no value in her new scheme of life. Everywhere she found men and women anxious to establish more or less intimate relations,—men especially, but men and their attentions no longer possessed any appeal for her. Their money, their position, their influence, their good or bad looks, meant nothing to her. Again and again they begged her to go to this party or to that, to supper, to a dance, to a midnight frolic. Invariably she met these invitations with a definite "No." She felt no inclination to accept. To reach Madame Boulanger's after the theatre by eleven-twenty or at the latest the half hour, was of more importance to her.

She moved into a larger room, the back one on the second floor which had a fireplace and a bath; she in-

duced Madame to pay Miranda the money each week she had been giving to herself, and by the third week of "Jenny's" run she had repaid John the last of the money she owed him. He had protested against taking it, but she swept his objections aside.

When, out of her savings, she felt she could spare two hundred more, she took the bills to him.

"I want you to get a money order and send this to a man out in San Francisco; he's the one I borrowed it from when I had to help George on his feet and buy the dog back, remember? I'd like you to send it to him but I don't want you to mention my name. Simply say that you understand that a year ago the money was borrowed under peculiar circumstances and that now the party to whom it was lent is in a position to repay it. You'll have to sign your own name, of course, and give your address but not one word of me. Register the letter and request the Post Office to return you a receipt."

There was another phase of her new fortunes which, while often bothersome, was far from having an altogether unpleasant side. She was constantly being photographed and interviewed. Henry Meserve's press agent, a young, enterprising Hebrew named Fishback, was indefatigable in attempting to secure mention of the play and a discussion of it in the newspapers. Zelda was an outstanding note of human interest, and he made use of her unsparingly. He even brought her propositions for the endorsements of cold creams, veils, lingerie, and requests for patronage from Fifth Avenue shops. She declined these; instinctively she felt that this sort of self-advertising was injurious. Being photographed was another matter; she made excellent pictures and the results were usually flattering. She was photographed with pail and scrubbing brush, in costume, in street clothes, and in evening attire. All the newspapers and magazines ran her pictures. She could hardly open a news sheet or the pages of a periodical without finding herself. Her gratification over this widespread publicity

passed with amazing quickness; she grew weary of posing before the camera. Clothes interested her, they had lost none of their attraction, but it pleased her to affect simplicity in dress now, black frocks with white linen collars and cuffs, dark blue and brown foulards, a severe pongee with reddish brown trimmings at neck and wrist, plain tailored hats, a rough plaid with a herring-bone stripe for wet weather, and a long skirted Hudson seal for cold.

§ 6

Of those interested in her new fortunes, John Chapman alone showed an unalloyed delight and generous satisfaction. At times he actually twitched and trembled with excess of emotion. Zelda often found him embarrassing, when, with others present, he betrayed the tumult of his feelings. During the first weeks of the play, he never missed a performance, and, being unable to afford a seat, stood up "in back." Often Zelda would catch sight of his big lumbering figure on the outskirts of the loiterers around the stage entrance when she left the theatre to go home. He was there to accompany her, of course, but Zelda generally was too weary to be burdened with him. A taxi and a speedy return to Madame Boulanger's were uppermost in her mind; she could not allow John to pay the fare, he was humiliated if she insisted upon doing it herself. Then too, he always wanted to talk, tediously, laboriously, and she was never in the mood. She made arrangements with a man who owned a motor car, and hired him to meet her after every performance and whisk her home. Night after night, she skipped across the sidewalk, jumped into the waiting vehicle, slammed the door, in seven minutes was in her own room, and in another twenty in bed and often asleep.

John presumably plodded home by himself, thought his own thoughts, mooned about in his room, and

eventually went to bed. She was sorry for him, she exerted herself to be pleasant, but permitting him to escort her home after the theatre was more than she could endure.

When he came to her one day and reminded her of a promise she had made him several weeks earlier, to call with him upon his sister and his nephew at the Hotel Netherlands, she cheerfully agreed. Mrs. Harney had suggested he bring her to tea, and upon a Sunday afternoon she set out with him to keep the engagement. She was curious to see what John's relatives were like. His sister, she remembered, was a widow, with a considerable fortune, who had been spending the last few years in Europe educating her son. Zelda was delighted to find her gray haired, simple, low voiced, a woman who dressed richly yet in good taste, who was charming, interested and interesting. Zelda immediately warmed to her; she realized she had never come in contact with quite such a cultivated gentlewoman before. Mrs. Harney had seen "Jenny" and was enthusiastic about the play and about Zelda's part in it.

"We saw it in London too, before we left," she said. "It's at the Savoy, and Tom and I found it most interesting to compare the way they do it over there with how it's done here. We both like the American production better, although I believe Mr. Blum himself directed, or at least superintended the English one. Tom says maybe that's what's the matter with it,"—she laughed lightly,—"at any rate we prefer the way you do it. Perhaps Fitzgibbon's 'Niles' is a more finished piece of acting than that of the man,—I forget his name,—who plays the part here, but of course your 'Jenny' is quite unapproached by the other one. Tom,—he'll be here in a moment,—has been to see your version three times."

"He has!" Zelda exclaimed, surprised.

"We all went the first night my sister and nephew arrived," John explained, "and Tom liked it so much

he went with me to a Saturday matinée, and Grace tells me he was there again last night."

Zelda glanced from brother to sister as she lifted her teacup to her lips. It was hard to believe they were related. Mrs. Harney was considerably the elder and at least a third John's size, a small woman with small feet and hands. Zelda noted how deftly and prettily her ringed fingers managed the tea things.

"My son's interested in plays. He wants to write them, he says, and he's really been studying the technique of the drama for some time. He thinks 'Jenny' is one of the best examples of—ah, here he is, and he can tell you himself."

A tall young man came in. At a glance Zelda saw that he was handsome, in a distinguished way, with clean, strong features, white teeth, and a nice face; about her own age.

He came straight across the room to her, smiling in friendly fashion, took her hand, and kissed it. It was the first time she ever had had her hand kissed, but she liked the way Tom Harney did it.

"I'm delighted to meet you, Miss Marsh," he said without waiting to be introduced; "I've been so thrilled all day by the prospect of your coming to tea with Mother and me that I've been completely demoralized, and the moment I had been looking forward to, I bungled horribly by not being here when you came."

He spoke with a slight English accent. She would have taken him for an Englishman; the gaiters he wore, the striped trousers contributed to the impression. His frankness and aplomb confused her a little. She caught sight of John on the opposite side of the room beaming with fatuous approval. She liked his nephew, she liked his sister, but she was far from feeling at ease. These people belonged to a more cultivated circle of society than she had ever known. She was self-conscious, on guard, fearful of the wrong word or act.

If they noticed her restraint, they ignored it. There

was not the slightest indication of condescension towards her, though she was on the lookout for it. Rather they deferred to her, soliciting her opinions, waiting on her mood. More than once she wondered if they were making fun of her. She had never before had the experience of being accepted socially by people of their world without reserve. Despite her caution, she found herself presently discussing Blum's play as if she had known these relatives of John's for years.

"After all it's a satire," she was saying. "Most people try to read some significance into the character of 'Jenny'; one reviewer, I remember, called her a sort of Greek chorus; others have said that Blum uses 'Jenny' to voice his own comments on the situations of the play as it progresses. I don't believe it. Jenny's a character all by herself, and Jenny says what Jenny thinks."

"Exactly," Tom Harney cried delightedly. He went on to discuss the structure of the play, and Zelda realized he was unusually well informed on the subject.

"You've studied the theatre," she observed.

"Oh yes, off and on,—at Princeton and Oxford and ever since."

"Mercy, you must be an educated person!"

"Not a bit. I never did a stroke of work at either university, I didn't have to, and they don't go in for the technique of the modern theatre in colleges. That's all that ever interested me."

"And have you written plays?"

He blushed quickly. He had curly hair, nice and brown, and the blush rose to the roots of it.

"I don't know why I should grow red about it," he laughed, "maybe it's because you're an actress,—although I've talked to plenty of actresses before. Maybe it's because I never talked to one I thought so . . . so . . ."

She was amused and smiled encouragingly. She liked

this young man; there was something unusually fresh and unspoiled about him.

"So what?" she demanded.

"Clever," he finished a little flatly.

"Oh, is that all!"

She could not help it. This was flirting, wrong and inexcusable, and she had vowed her flirting days were over.

"I don't dare tell you what else. You'd think me presumptuous, and I want very much to have you like me."

The seriousness of his tone arrested her.

She measured him with a swift glance, estimating him neatly, completely. A second's study, no more, but in that second she appraised him accurately, and recaptured self-possession. With a sweet, impersonal smile, she turned from him to his mother.

"You're going to miss Europe, I'm afraid, Mrs. Harney,—after being so long abroad."

"No, I think not; Tom and I have had about all we want of wandering. There's not much satisfaction you know in being eternally on the move. We've come home and I think we'll stay home. 'The Netherlands' will probably do us nicely for this winter, but when the spring comes I think we'll look up an old farmhouse in Pennsylvania on the Susquehanna River where Mr. Harney lived as a boy. It's been in his family for nearly a hundred years, and is pretty well dilapidated, I fancy; but we think we'll refurnish it, and try housekeeping for a while. Tom thinks it's pretty far from Broadway."

"I don't want to be such a distance from the city that I can't run in to see an interesting show once in a while."

"You'll only be there in the summer time, won't you?" Zelda queried.

"Probably four or five months, unless it grows too warm."

"There's never anything interesting in New York during the hot weather."

"Perhaps, but I want to be where I can easily get in touch with theatrical people."

"You see, he's bent on writing plays, Miss Marsh. He's like a colt with the bit in his teeth, and I suppose I must give him his head," she sighed indulgently.

"Has Mother shown you any of the things we picked up on the other side?"

The apartment was beautifully furnished, with one or two pieces of old tapestry, some antique cabinets, Florentine chairs, paintings in dark gold frames. Zelda had accepted these without notice.

"I'd like to show you our *pièce de resistance,* if you're interested. It's that nail-studded box over there; it's full of secret compartments, a jolly piece of work. Let me show it to you. It's perfectly *mar*velous."

Zelda thought it wiser to remain beside his mother, and she pretended not to hear.

"You've been very kind to this big brother of mine," Mrs. Harney said, putting a small feminine hand on John's broad knee.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Harney, it's he that's been kind to me!"

"Perhaps you've been kind to each other. At any rate, he's written very affectionately and gratefully of you. I feel that I'm indebted to you as well. . . . Tell me, Miss Marsh, your parents, are they living?"

"No, they are both dead."

"And you have no relatives?"

"No,—not any."

"Your home used to be in California, John tells me. Mr. Harney and I spent part of our honeymoon there. We stopped at the Palace Hotel, I remember. Such a charming place."

"People generally have a most affectionate feeling toward San Francisco."

"Have you seen our view, Miss Marsh?" Tom

again. "You can see the whole Park from these windows. It's simply *mar*velous."

He had an odd way, not at all unattractive, of accenting the first syllable of his adjectives to make them more emphatic.

"Let Miss Marsh finish her tea, Tom. You must come to lunch with me some day, Miss Marsh, where we won't be interrupted. I want to learn to know better the young lady who's been so kind to our John." She whispered: "Of course, he thinks the sun rises and sets with Miss Zelda Marsh, and I'm beginning to understand why."

It was Zelda's turn to color. These people were so kindly, so charmingly cordial to her, so bent on being friends. It bewildered her.

"I know how it is, if you leave things like that in the air," pursued Mrs. Harney, "and I *really* want you to come so that we *really* can get acquainted, so let's say Tuesday. How would Tuesday do? Wednesday I understand you have a matinée, but *do* say Tuesday and please make no other plans for the afternoon for I want a long visit from you. . . . Now, run along to Tom and see the view."

Zelda had no other alternative.

At the window:

"Now have you ever seen anything more perfectly *gor*geous than that? It's much lovelier than Hyde Park or the *Bois*. Look at that flaming red tree there in the midst of all that yellow. It's like a tongue of fire, isn't it?"

"It's beautiful. I love the fall in New York. It's the nicest time of the year to me."

"Oh, do you think so? I love winter best,—skating, bob-sledding, skiing. Did you ever try skiing, Miss Marsh? It's perfectly *won*derful. I tried it a bit when we were in Switzerland."

"I don't know a thing about winter sports. We don't

have snow in California. I've never even been in a sleigh."

"Never been sleigh riding?" His tone was astonished.

"No, I haven't the faintest notion what it's like."

"Well, my goodness, will you let me take you sleigh riding as soon as the snow comes? It would be such a privilege!"

A slight elevation of her brows stopped him.

"The Park is a very lovely sight." She pronounced the words as if she read them, and turned to John.

"It's after six . . ." she began significantly.

"Oh no, *please* don't go! Why, you haven't more than just come!"

This time she rebuked him with a look.

"I must be at the theatre at an early eight," she said evenly.

"Oh——"

"You mustn't be so insistent, Tom. Miss Marsh has her work to do day in and day out; it's a great strain, I imagine." Mrs. Harney's voice was always gentle. "You'll let us be friends, won't you, my dear,—we like you so much,—and give us what time you can spare. Tuesday, I shall look for you at one."

Tom brought her seal coat, and solicitously held it for her.

"Lucky Uncle John," he murmured.

"How?" She did not catch his meaning.

"Seeing you home."

She ignored the explanation. She did not quite like his saying it.

"Good-bye, thank you so much,—you've been very kind."

"Oh, my dear!"

"It's been truly delightful."

"You'll come on Tuesday?"

"On Tuesday—at one. Thank you."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

A nod in Tom's direction, a nod that included mother and son, the whole room. The look she saw on his face was unmistakable.

"Oh, dear," she sighed as she proceeded down the broad hotel corridor toward the elevator, and there was real vexation in her tone.

CHAPTER V

§ 1

The Harneys, mother and son, swept into Zelda's life like a great wind and threatened to demoralize it.

Tom was in love with her. He had fallen in love with her almost at the first moment he had seen her. John knew it; his mother knew it; Zelda knew it. Had he met her a few weeks earlier, the girl wondered, when she had been the sober faced, drably dressed housekeeper at Madame Boulanger's, running up and down stairs, calling directions through the stairwell to Miranda two flights below, would he still have admired her so extravagantly? She doubted it. Her success, the fact that her name was for the moment on everybody's lips, that she was an actress, part of the profession with which he hoped some day to be associated as an author, all these lent her a glittering glamour. Whatever the contributory factors, there was no questioning the tumultuousness of his infatuation. He was desperately, madly in love.

She deeply regretted it. She was honest enough to admit herself not a little flattered that so handsome, so attractive a youth should come to care for her, yet with equal honesty she could say that she would have given a great deal if it had not happened. John was to blame, blundering, clumsy John, and Zelda could have annihilated him for his meddling. It had been John's secret hope for the better part of a year, she learned, that his nephew Tom should fall in love with her, that she should return his affection, and by some mad process of his own mad brain, they should marry! Zelda, beyond the possibility of his own grasp,

should become his favored nephew's; Tom, brilliant, handsome, wealthy, alone was worthy of her! It represented to him the supreme sacrifice of love. His letters to his sister had been full of Zelda's praises,—she was the most remarkable girl in the world, tender, loving, unselfish. She had been through terrible travail and had come out of it unscathed, stronger, finer, purer than before; she was sweet, she had a glorious mind, she was beautiful and good! Mrs. Harney with innocent amusement showed Zelda some of these effusions, but in not one of them was there a hint that she was married. The gray-haired, doting mother, wanting above everything in the world the right wife for her gifted son, already looked approvingly upon Zelda. The girl was of his own selection; he was hopelessly in love with her. She could ask for nothing better; for years she had been obsessed with the fear of a far less appropriate fate for him. She explained this to Zelda with simple frankness.

"You see, my dear, Tom's conspicuous and he makes friends easily. In Paris, London, even in Rome he was invited everywhere. It was whispered, with I fear much exaggeration, that he had independent means, also expectations; you know what mothers of marriageable daughters are. I blush for some of those we met in Cannes and Nice; they almost thrust their girls in Tom's face. I assure you, some of them sank so low as to connive at situations in which their daughters might be compromised by an impulsive young man, and a marriage forced that way. I warned Tom,—and oh, I'll say this for my son, he's no fool. There wasn't a week or a day while we were in Europe that I didn't tremble for fear that one of these girls might catch his fancy. Some of them were titled too. He could have had his choice. But what then? I should have lost my boy, I should have had to hand him over, body and soul, to a woman of another race, another religion, with totally different traditions, different codes, who would have

had a host of relatives to help mould my boy into their ways of living and thinking. I never wearied of telling him that he must wait for an American girl, one of his own lineage, and background. I think I influenced him. . . . Then we came home and I faced fresh terrors. There are always women of loose morals, chorus girls,—I mean the cheap, trashy sort,—who are lying in wait for boys like Tom. He is their natural prey. And there is the equally dangerous type—undesirable at least from my standpoint,—the society girl, the débutante. I want a girl from neither class for a daughter-in-law. I was a working girl, Miss Marsh, when I married Tom's father; I was a school-teacher, and I prefer working girls. They make good wives, and it is my earnest prayer that Tom will choose one,—a girl who is interested in her work, be it that of a clerk in a department store or a woman with a profession."

It was the day following this conversation that Zelda went straight to John. She found him in his room; she went in, shut the door, and spoke her mind, too agitated, too indignant to spare him.

"But why—why—*why?*" she demanded; "for what good purpose did you keep the fact that I was married a secret from them? Why didn't you tell them? What object did it serve? What did you hope to gain? . . . Oh, John, John, what a bungling idiot you are—and what a mess you've made of it."

She had to struggle with herself before going on.

"You know what kind of a woman I am, you know my history, and yet you foster and engineer a situation which can only bring misery to everyone concerned—

"Listen to me," she ordered as his big face began to work; "I want you to hear what I've got to say first. I am what I am, my past is what it is; I married and my marriage went on the rocks because I didn't tell my husband all he was entitled to know about me—

"Entitled or not, what difference did it make?" she

asked sharply as she saw the protest in his eyes. "The fact remains that when George found out about me, he left me. That was my medicine. I took it like what I hope was a good sport. I haven't grumbled or complained. But I don't propose to make the same mistake twice. You take your nephew away; take him away, out of my life. I never want to see him again If I do, I'm going to tell him as fast as I can that I've got a perfectly good live husband in this world who's liable to turn up any minute.

"Hang it, John," she continued crossly, "I'm not the type of girl your sister is looking for as a daughter-in-law, and you know it. It would finish her if she found out about me,—she'd never hold up her head again. It's bad enough as it is; it's going to hurt them, hurt them both a lot, and I like them so—so much."

Her voice trailed off disconsolately, and she went to the window and stood there frowning down into the street. There was an interval of silence, then John began to speak, his voice coming wetly, hoarsely, from behind his big palms that covered his face.

"I—I—I d-don't care what the w-world thinks—thinks of you, Zelda. I don't care what you've done, or w-what you will ever do. To me you are the best, the kindest, the noblest woman there is. You've never had a m-mean thought, you've never done a mean act, and that's—that's what makes for goodness. You—you are the finest woman I've ever known. You're like an angel out of heaven. You're far, far too good for Tom Harney, if you want to know what *I* think. Grace c-could g-get down on her knees and t-thank her Almighty God if she got a daughter-in-law like you. Married? What difference does that make? You never loved George Selby, you never really belonged to him,—and even so, the man is dead, he's gone out of your life, you are just like a widow. . . . I may be a fool and I may be a bungling one, but you—you're far too good for Tom. Ah, please—*please,* Zelda, don't tell him you're mar-

ried, don't say anything to him yet! Let me talk with Grace first!"

§ 2

That very night the opportunity presented itself to enlighten Tom, and Zelda took it. A box of violets and his card had been brought to her dressing room. On the card he had written:

I'm out in front again. It's a packed house. May I see you home?

As she came out of the dirty alley, he was waiting,—tall, handsome, distinguished in manner and dress. A pang smote her as she realized she must send him from her.

"Let's walk," she proposed, "I love these frosty nights."

He put his arm beneath hers and as they strode along in step, he began enthusiastically to tell her about an idea for a play he had. It was to be called "The Drudge" and she was to play the title rôle, if she would, of course; just thinking about her doing it would be a tremendous incentive.

"It's a corking idea," he said exultingly, "you'll like it, you're bound to. It's going to be perfectly *marvelous*. I want to get a rough draft of it down on paper before I tell you anything more about it. It's —it's the biggest idea that's ever come to me. I want you to help me with it, let me go over it scene by scene with you and have you tell me whether anything's technically at fault."

Now—now was the moment. She must not hesitate.

"My husband used to consult me about his vaudeville sketches when he wrote them," she interjected casually; "we were in vaudeville, you know."

Silence. They swung along, arm in arm, no lessening of their pace, no faltering in their steps. Zelda went on talking at random to give him time to collect himself.

She could feel the wound yawning in his side so near her own.

"There was one sketch he wrote called 'A Cat and Dog Life' and it was quite successful. We played it all over the Sullivan & Considine circuit. I remember we opened in Winnipeg,—oh, it was raining so, and the theatre was cold as an iceberg. We went as far west with it as Seattle and then down the coast to San Francisco. We had a real cat and dog with us, they were part of the act, and the dog was the dearest animal that ever lived; his name was 'Buster.' . . ."

On and on and on.

At last a sound,—a careful preliminary clearing of his throat.

"Your husband's living still?"

"Oh yes."

"Then you're divorced?"

"Oh, indeed, no." She spoke flippantly, carelessly, knowing every word rent the wound wider and deeper. She even laughed, and in the sound there was a ring of ribaldry. What did it matter? He might as well think the worst of her. The kindest thing she could do was to send him from her shocked and disillusionized.

"George and I just separated, that's all. We had a disagreement when we reached Frisco, thought we could do better for ourselves if each went it alone; I don't know where he went or what's become of him. Suppose he's still in vaudeville."

Home at last, Madame's chipped and stained brownstone front. Up the steps she ran, leaving him at the foot, standing there very still, hat in hand.

"Well, see you soon. My love to your mother. Good night. Thanks for the flowers. It was nice of you to see me home. I love these frosty nights. Good-bye. . . ."

The door open,—shut. She was inside, in the dim hall where the lowered gas jet in its cylindrical shade of art glass threw round medallions of red, white and blue circles on walls and ceiling. She leaned upon the

door, her back against it, her hands clasping the knob. Then through her nostrils she drew a deep breath, held it until it burst from her sharply.

"Well, that's over," she said aloud and marched upstairs.

§ 3

But she was mistaken: it was far from over.

A few days passed,—a week. John avoided her. He knew she was displeased with him, and risked no encounter. He was absent even from the tea hour with Madame Boulanger. Zelda told the Frenchwoman the story from beginning to end, and Madame disposed of John with a sharp:

"Imbecile."

He forced himself one day to approach her. Embarrased to the point where she feared an epileptic stroke, his face working, his eyes rolling, he finally delivered himself of a message. Would she see his sister? Mrs. Harney wanted to talk to her; she had begged her brother to convey the request and had given him a note to deliver.

Be generous to an old woman and come to me. Any afternoon that will suit your convenience will suit that of your affectionate friend,

Grace Chapman Harney.

"But what's the *use,* John?" Zelda demanded crossly. "It will only make matters worse. There's nothing to be done."

"Maybe; I don't know. Go anyhow, Zelda. Grace said—I said . . . You'll go, won't you? It will mean a lot to her."

"Will Tom be there?"

"Course not. . . . I don't know at any rate. Grace wants to talk to you alone she said; that's all. I don't know what she wants to talk to you about."

"You lie," Zelda told him unfeelingly, "you know

perfectly well. You might have saved me this, if you had had the sense you were born with. It only means another painful interview. . . . However, I'll go, not because I think it's any use, but because your sister's a lady, and I like her, and I wouldn't hurt her feelings for the world. . . ."

§ 4

The next afternoon she called at the Netherlands.

"It's very kind of you to come to see me, Miss Marsh, very kind and very gracious. I feel that you and I are friends, my dear,—I hope you consider me your friend,—and like two friends we must talk this situation over frankly and see what's best to be done, if anything's to be done. I can easily imagine how upset you are about it, and one of the reasons I asked you to see me is so that I can tell you with my own lips that neither Tom nor I attach the slightest blame to you for the misunderstanding that has arisen. He is very anxious that I should make this clear to you and I'm as eager to have you believe it as is he. My poor boy is very badly broken up, but he is most insistent that I tell you that we feel that the mistake—and it's been a most deplorable one, I'm frank to say,—has been wholly ours. There is no need to bandy words. You know, and my own heart told me before either you or my unfortunate son had the faintest inkling of it, that he had fallen very desperately in love with you, and up until the moment that this fatal news reached me, I was very happy about it,—very happy indeed. It's been most unfortunate, of course. John tells me very penitently and very brokenly, that you hold him responsible, and he blames himself unsparingly for what has happened. He should have told us, of course, but I cannot be hard on him. I've known Johnnie all my life. He was still a little fellow, when I was twice his age. I know how his mind works. He meant it all for the best. He admires you and he has told me how much you have

suffered and how difficult a time you have had. My dear girl, my heart yearns toward you. I'm so sorry—so terribly sorry. I wish I could help. I want *so much* to help."

The sympathy, more than she had ever had from anyone in all her life, went straight to Zelda's heart. She could not hold back the tears that rose brimming to her eyes.

"I want to help my son too, if I can," Mrs. Harney continued. She looked earnestly at Zelda, and impulsively her hand went out to take one of the girl's, wet with her tears.

"Isn't there some way out?"

Zelda shook her head.

"Tell me about your marriage, my dear. Did you love him?"

Again Zelda could only indicate "No."

"Then why did you marry him?"

"Because I was hungry," burst from the girl and she despised herself the moment she had said it. She was not given to self-pity but Mrs. Harney's gentle sympathy had been more than she was proof against.

Haltingly the story came, little by little,—George's improvidence, his intemperance, his utter instability. Before it was over, it was the older woman who was in tears.

"At the last," finished Zelda, "we had a quarrel, words back and forth, and he said things I could never forgive,—I felt he would go on reproaching me as long as we stayed together,—so I walked out, that was all,—just picked up my hat and purse and left. Then came illness,—I was very sick,—and they sent me to the City Hospital. I've neither seen nor heard from him since."

"And would you like to—some day?" Mrs. Harney asked.

"Never. I want to live my own life. I want to be beholden and responsible to no one. I want to be

myself—*me*. I don't want George back; I never want to see him again. I don't want *any* man; I'm done with men. John's the only one who's ever been kind or fair to me."

"There is always a mother's heart," Mrs. Harney said slowly.

Zelda, not catching her meaning, looked up, saw the stricken expression in the gray eyes and it was her turn to reach out a hand.

"My son is very much attached to you," Mrs. Harney proceeded, choosing her words and looking thoughtfully upon the floor before her. "He has never been so—so . . . well, in love,—there's never a better word for it,—and he is deeply grieving. I think of him and of his happiness. Ever since he was born, I have thought of nothing else." She paused, considering; then: "You could be legally freed, you know. . . ."

The words hung in the air and Zelda's thoughts went somersaulting along the avenue they opened.

To be divorced from George, to feel he no longer had any hold on her, no longer any right to enter her life again or bother her? Yes, she would like that; that would be worth doing. . . . But then to marry Tom? That was what Mrs. Harney meant, of course. . . . She did not want to marry Tom! She *couldn't* marry Tom!

"You might consider the idea," Mrs Harney said in her gentle persuasive way. "Judge Chesebrough is a very dear friend of mine,—he takes care of all my affairs for me; you might talk to him some day. I could easily arrange an interview,—here, if you like, where you could see him alone and discuss the situation."

§ 5

Zelda had roses from Tom. Just his card with them; no message. Presently she commenced to find the long pasteboard box regularly in her dressing room. She

spoke to John; it was preposterous to waste money that way; moreover she hated flowers at the theatre, they made the dressing room smell and her head ache. There was an end to the roses. In a day or two a note:

Dear Miss Marsh: May I see you at your convenience regarding the play about which I spoke to you a fortnight ago? It's taking shape and I want so much to know what you think of it. May I call for you next Sunday afternoon and bring you here to the hotel for tea with Mother? She joins me in cordial regards.

Yours,

Tom Harney.

In answering she addressed him by his first name. It seemed more honest to her, and more honest too, to speak of things as they were; under the circumstances she hardly thought it wise to accept and she hoped he and his mother would understand and excuse her.

Next she saw him as she was leaving the theatre one night. Among others across the street and opposite the entrance of the alleyway, she recognized his tall figure. As she stepped into her car, he strode briskly away. Waiting for a glimpse of her! It made her uncomfortable to realize he cared so much.

And on the morrow she heard his voice behind John's closed door. His presence in the house increased her uneasiness. It was inevitable that she would encounter him. He was with John. Two overcoated figures in the shadow of a landing, shapes, nothing more, who drew aside and silently watched her as she sped down the stairs on her way to an afternoon performance. When at Madame's tea hour, or elsewhere in the house, she came face to face with John, his long dolorous countenance reproached her.

It grew annoying thus to be reminded of this sorrowful young man. She had never been consciously unkind to anyone, and it nettled her to feel that she was the cause of so much woe.

Opening the door of the house one day she found him on the landing, confronting her. One glance at his face dispelled the quick frown that centered between her brows. He looked stricken, ill. He seemed very much like a small boy to whom bigger boys had been unkind; the hurt in his eyes caught at her heart.

Putting out her hand, she took him by the arm.

"Come," she commanded, and led the way down the steps and along the street to the deserted grill room of a neighboring hotel. At a table in a corner, she ordered tea and cigarettes, accepted one from his case while they were being brought, lit it and filled her lungs with a deep inhalation.

"Well," said she, "tell me what's the matter?"

"There is no need, is there?" he smiled ruefully.

"Come now," she said impatiently, "it isn't as bad as all that."

"As all what?"

An impatient exclamation broke from her.

"Making yourself ill, distressing your mother, making me uncomfortable."

"I don't want to distress anybody, Miss Marsh, and if I'm causing you the least bit of trouble I'll go away."

It was very humble, disarming.

"Don't you realize, Tom," she said more gently, "that I'm only trying to save you pain?—"

"I know that."

"—that I believe it's for your own good, and mine too for that matter, that we do not see anything further of one another?"

"I'd be content with very little."

"A friendship between us is impossible."

"I don't aspire even to that."

"As you came to know me better, you'd find me disappointing."

"Uncle John doesn't seem to think so."

"Your Uncle John——" she paused; she wanted to

say: "Is an old fool," but the boy wouldn't understand that.

"Miss Marsh, if I promise not to annoy you——"

She drew a deep breath and let it go with a quick drop of her shoulders.

"Hear me, please," he said earnestly, "I ask for so little. I promise not to annoy you. You'll have no fault to find with me. I'll not burden you with my presence or with my attentions."

His words suddenly became eager and he tumbled them from him in a rush of supplication.

"Listen, listen, Miss Marsh,—listen to what I have to say. My Uncle John loves you, he's been in love with you, he says, almost from the very first day you came to live in the same house with him. He tells everybody who will listen, how he worships and adores you. You tolerate—you are friendly with him. Why deny me, what you grant him? I'm not ashamed of the way I feel about you,—it is no sin to love,—I cannot help it.

"Why should I be punished for the way I feel? If I annoy you, if I am troublesome, send me away,—but why can't you be as kind to me as you are to Uncle John? Be generous, Miss Marsh——" His voice broke, and he had a moment's struggle before he could go on. "I need your help, your friendship so badly. This play of mine, 'The Drudge,' depends on you. Oh yes, it does. I cannot write it for anybody but you. If you are not to do it, then I have no wish to write it. Believe me, it's a fact. If I can aspire to nothing more than being just a friend,—an acquaintance, let us say,—I can find comfort and satisfaction in work, in writing this play. But only for you. You may not like it,—but you will, you will. It *is* a good play. I know it. Tolerate me only as a playwright who has a possible play that you may care to do next season. Just friendly recognition means so much to me, Miss Marsh; it means life, it means work, it means *everything!* Deny me the opportunity of

seeing you once in a while, of reading my play to you, take from me the possibility, the hope that you may do it some day, and I am lost. I don't want to work, I don't want to live."

Suddenly he covered his face with his hands.

"I suppose there is nothing so ridiculous as a man in love. I've jeered at others; I've scoffed at many of my friends who've been this way, but I never dreamed it was so bad. I can't help it; I don't want to help it. But I promise I won't be a nuisance. Perhaps I'll grow accustomed to feeling like this after a time, and maybe it won't be so hard. I can't tell. All I beg for now is just a trial, just to be tolerated as a casual acquaintance while I write my play. Grant me that, Miss Marsh; let me show you a rough draft of 'The Drudge,'—and then, if you don't like it, you can deny me everything!"

Zelda studied him for a long moment with a troubled, puzzled frown, noted the blue shadows beneath his eyes, the lines of pain about his mouth, and there came to her the memory of emotions that she herself had had in other years. While yet her frowning gaze moved from feature to feature of his twisted face, her lips formed a voiceless "Michael." Then upon a long breath she said resignedly:

"Well, you can begin by calling me 'Zelda.'"

§ 6

Was she doing right? Was she being fair to him, to herself? Would the day come when she would bitterly regret having consented to this friendly intercourse? She did not know. In the weeks that followed, while the association rapidly assumed the proportions of an intimacy, she was pursued with misgivings.

At the outset, she had supposed she would see Tom now and then; she proposed to be kind, casual, nothing more. She found it impossible. The play made it impossible, for to her astonishment, she discovered that

the young man had conceived a play which, making every allowance for her own inexperience and unletteredness, every instinct told her was remarkable. As the idea of his plot was fully revealed to her on a certain Sunday evening when he outlined it at his mother's apartment, she sat upright in her seat, breathless with excitement.

"I've had the idea in mind for a long time," he told her, "but I've always thought of it as a fantasy. But now, I've got a different slant on the situation, a twist that didn't come to me until I saw you doing 'Jenny.' It flashed on me when I was watching you, and the scheme I now have is to twist the whole thing from fantasy and make it grim reality. You see, my play will be the story of the drudge herself and the fantasy part will be what she dreams. . . ."

He went on to elaborate the play.

". . . And at the end," he finished, "the audience won't know what's real and what's fantasy, and,—what I particularly want to accomplish,—they won't care. I think I can do it; I certainly hope so, at any rate."

"Tom, Tom!" Zelda burst out, "Henry Meserve would sell his soul for a play like that! I may not know what I'm talking about, but I think it's tremendous."

The young playwright beamed.

"I *do* think it's original. Nothing like it has ever been done, but of course, I may ruin it when I come to writing it. I don't know whether Mr. Meserve will want it or not, but nobody's ever going to play it but you, Zelda. Promise me that or there'll not be a line of it written."

"Promise you, my dear Tom! Why I'd get down on my knees and crawl the length of Broadway to have such a part! I only hope I *can* play it; I only hope I'm *good* enough!"

"Good enough? Good Lord, Zelda, the play's you, I tell you, it's written for you, about you—you've inspired it."

"Would you like to see Henry and talk it over with him?"

"Not yet. Mr. Meserve may be the most honest theatrical manager in the business, certainly that's his reputation, but theatrical producers are only human after all. He might whisper the idea of it to somebody, and before you'd know it there'd be another play with the same plot. I've talked to Judge Chesebrough and he advised me to have a copy of the play filed at Washington and have it copyrighted before I show it to anybody. Oh, Zelda, if you'll play it there isn't a manager in this city that won't be ready and eager to give it a try-out. Anyhow I feel I can't do it without you. I need your encouragement and I need your advice. I need you to write to, if you know what I mean, and there are going to be a thousand technicalities I shall want to discuss with you as I go along."

That was how the intimacy began and how it grew. Little by little.

On Christmas Day, a note with a great sheaf of American Beauties, and also a nosegay from his mother. On the following Wednesday, accidentally,—or perhaps he was waiting for her,—she met him in front of the theatre, and he announced triumphantly that the first act was begun and nearly half done. On New Year's Eve, the Meserves gave an after the theatre supper party and it was obligatory for Zelda to go. For an escort, she had the choice of Ralph Martingale, or an English youth named Carstairs, who had a small part in "Jenny," but was insipid and effeminate, or Tom Harney. She chose Tom. She knew Norman Carruth would be there and that he would drink too much and annoy her with his attentions. She needed somebody to accompany her and Tom was only too eager to go. He made a delightful impression. Ned was enthusiastic about him, led him into a corner, asked him intimate questions about himself while

she waved her white arms, jangled her bracelets, and studied him from between half-closed lids.

"He's divine," she whispered to Zelda, "Adonis. Bring him to see me."

Henry was pleasantly cordial too. Zelda had said, introducing him:

"The author of my next play, Mr. Meserve," and Henry had answered in his most magnetic manner,

"Then I'm its producer, I hope."

Following this, Mrs. Harney invited her to dine with her and Tom on a Sunday evening, suggesting that John bring her if she were free to accept. And on the heels of this invitation, came another, again to dinner, which was served intimately upstairs in the Harneys' apartment, and to which John was not invited. After the coffee and the cigarettes Mrs. Harney withdrew, while Tom read Zelda his first act, a powerful act too, that touched something deep within the girl's soul and made her want to cry, not because it was sad but because it stirred her and she saw herself playing it, and knew she could. A flame seemed to consume them both that night, the flame of achievement. She found herself moving restlessly about the room, on fire with enthusiasm; her warmth exalted him. She came perilously near forgetting the barrier that separated them as he stood at the foot of Madame Boulanger's steps saying good night to her; at the moment he seemed so likeable, so attractive.

"Fool, fool," she said to herself accusingly, a few minutes later when she was alone in her room, "you've no right to be friendly with him. There can only be one end to it. Why waste your time? Why bother your head about him? Men are all the same. You're beginning to like him too well to have him hurt,—and you don't want to deceive him."

But the thought that was with her as she closed her eyes and settled herself to sleep was not of him, but of his work.

"What a play! What a play! Please God, he won't spoil it."

§ 7

It looked as if he could not spoil it. The *dénouement,* as Tom called it, he had clearly in mind, and was the concluding scene in the play; he had but to write to it, he told Zelda, and then "bring down his curtain." The second act, when it was finished, pleased her as much as the first, but the third act produced the unexpected snag. In despair Tom proposed taking his plot to a playwright of proven abilty and handing the whole scheme over to him. Sacrilege to Zelda. She felt that "The Drudge" was their play, his to be sure, but hers in some measure, for into her soul had crept the feeling of being the drudge, and as she went about her daily routine, playing "Jenny" six nights and two matinées each week, subconsciously she was acting and living the other character as well. Her thoughts these days often returned to Ward 35, and she brought to mind some of the old hags she had met there. She knew exactly how she would dress the part, how bedraggled she should look, just how she would "make-up."

Tom had his moods of elation and dejection just as George had had. Zelda found she had to sympathize, encourage and praise him quite as barefacedly as she had been wont to flatter her husband, but there was this vast difference between the two: Tom was a gentleman, George was not. Tom never offended her, never said the wrong word or did the wrong thing. No hint of love making escaped him; by not so much as a lingering look or the flicker of an eyelash did he betray his real feeling for her. And Zelda found she thoroughly enjoyed him as a friend. He was the most satisfactory, the most companionable, the most delightful one she had ever had. His mother added much to the relationship. Zelda grew fonder and fonder of Mrs. Harney, a quiet, unobtrusive woman with a fine mind and a

shrewd intelligence, who lived but for two purposes: that her son should receive the best that life could offer, and that she should never be wholly separated from him.

§ 8

Toward the end of March, a sign was posted on the call board at Zelda's theatre that "Jenny" would close its New York run on the Saturday night next but one, and that the company would go to Boston and open there Easter Monday at the Park Theatre.

The prospect of a change brought home to Zelda how much she had grown to depend on the Harneys for companionship. She hated parting from them. Hardly a day passed that she did not see one or the other. Often she lunched with the mother at Sherry's, teaed with the son, and dined with them both in their apartment-suite at the hotel. Tom frequently escorted her to a concert or a picture show in the afternoon and always on Thursday to a matinée performance at another theatre. He usually met her at night after her play ended, and, dismissing her waiting motor car, would walk home with her, discussing some new point in his own work which the day or evening had brought to light. And in addition to these meetings, there were innumerable other ways in which the interests of her life had become knit with those of these friendly, well-bred people. Zelda dreaded the thought of cold, cheerless Boston, yet for one reason she was glad to go: she could take time to consider whither this increasing intimacy was drifting. She was uneasy regarding it. The play, which she felt certain she would do the following season, and which with equal certainty she believed would be an outstanding success, would bind her closer than ever to the Harneys. What lay at the end? Marriage with Tom? Impossible. In the first place, she did not love him that way; in the next as

a wife for him she was ineligible. . . . Boston promised an opportunity for reflection.

Her meditations, however, profited her nothing.

The reception in Boston revived all the excitement of the New York opening. The critics divided their praises between Blum's work and Zelda's acting. Even more than in New York, she became the featured member of the company and Ned frankly exhibited jealousy and ill will. The younger woman felt lonely, unhappy, and was desperately homesick.

On each of the four Sundays she was in Boston, Tom took the train up from New York and spent the day with her. Talk about the play was his excuse, but she told him quite candidly that she did not know what she would have done if he had not come to amuse her.

In May the company moved to Chicago, but in the western city she fared even worse than in Boston. Again both she and the play scored, and Ned openly declared war. She stared rudely at Zelda when they met, made slurring remarks about her in her hearing, and in the two scenes she had with her in the play, did what she could to embarrass and confuse her. Zelda was forced to complain to Mr. Meserve. She begged him to find a substitute for her, but he pointed out that "Zelda Marsh" as "Jenny" was so definitely linked in the public mind with the play's success that another actress in the part would be bad for the show and bad for him. He urged her to remain until the hot weather closed the run, and Zelda thinking of "The Drudge" and that this man, Henry Meserve, preëminently among theatrical producers was the one to present it, unhappily agreed. It was small satisfaction to learn that he and Ned, following this talk, had a fearful quarrel. It all made for unpleasantness, and Zelda longed to be done with "Jenny" and back once more in her old quarters at Madame Boulanger's, among those who loved and valued her.

But she was destined never to enter Madame's

chipped and discolored brown-stone front again. The first week in June, a fortnight before the play closed, a telegram came from John:

Our old staunch French friend is no more. Found in bed this morning where peacefully she had gone to sleep. No pain; no premonition of the end. My sympathy is with you as I know yours is with me. Funeral on Friday at Paulist Church, Fifty-ninth Street. House to be closed immediately. I will look out for your personal effects left here and take them with me wherever I go. Grace and Tom join me in loving sympathy.

John.

CHAPTER VI

§ 1

MAMMOTH oaks covered with gray moss, an old cream painted brick house with quaint fan-shaped doors and small paned windows, a dilapidated barn peeling its whitewash and odorous of hay and horses, an ancient sunken garden of gnarled rose bushes and newly planted phlox and gillyflowers, the sleepy Susquehanna a stone's throw distant, such was "Harneycool," the Harney homestead, and here the summer days found Zelda, John, Tom, and Tom's mother.

It troubled Zelda at first to realize how easily she had been persuaded to come to them. She had searched for a good reason to decline the invitation but none had occurred to her. It had seemed so right and logical to say yes; moreover she had wanted to accept so badly. Worn out, frazzled of nerves, she needed a rest and the country; these people loved her and she them. Above all other considerations there was Tom's play. Meserve had read it, liked it, had agreed to produce it in the fall, but wanted changes. The third act,—there were four in all,—ought to be treated differently, he thought. Tom declared he could do nothing without Zelda's counsel and advice.

"Come to us, Zelda," Mrs. Harney wrote, "and have a sleepy, lazy time. We've been doing some strenuous renovating and parts of the old place are really tenantable at last. You'll be comfortable, I promise you. There are plenty of books and hammocks, and the swimming is glorious."

The letter was waiting for her on her return to New York and it seemed to answer every call within

her tired body and soul. She had not realized how thoroughly fagged she was, until, free at last from the demands of "Jenny," she was confronted with the necessity of summer plans. To these she had given no thought at all. There had been no dear grumbling old Madame to welcome her, and the confines of a hotel bedroom within twenty-four hours became insupportable. Gratefully, gladly she wired her acceptance, and Tom, in his shining new roadster, drove in and motored her all the way to the fragrance, the warmth and the peace of "Harneycool."

Fragrance, warmth, peace. The words told the story of these summer months. Zelda was happier than she had ever been in her life, and one shadow, and only one, marred the contentment and serenity that seemed to lap themselves graciously about her: Tom,—Tom, humble, eager, enthusiastic,—Tom, tender, devoted, adoring. She learned to like him so much! Not love perhaps,—no fierce, devastating passion such as once had run riot in her veins,—but an affection none the less real and deep. She would look into the eyes that ever paid her homage, with tenderness and trouble in her own. She was tempted sometimes to put her arms about him and draw his head against her breast. Oh, to spare him the heartache she felt she must inevitably inflict upon him! But in the matter of caresses, she was circumspectly on her guard. Disaster for him, for herself, lay there. Tom was too fine, too good, their friendship too perfect for her to run the risk of marring it.

In the mornings she would wake with heart flooding with contentment and well being. Her room was gay with colored chintz, the sunshine falling in bright parallelograms upon the rich soft rugs that covered the worn old wooden floor. The bed, the dresser, the fiddle-backed chairs, the quaint dropleaf desk, were of mahogany, colonial in design, and had been chosen, she suspected, in the expectation of her using them. Happy

sounds drifted in through the open window: the clink of milk cans, "Shep's" sharp bark, a screen door clapping shut, the cluck of chickens near the barn, a whirling grindstone, a scraping knife, Jonas, the hired man, whistling as he forked the hay, the drone of bees among the honeysuckle vines that mantled the side porch, Tom's voice, or John's, calling, the vibrant whirr of a motor engine starting, the lessening hum of the departing car.

At nine o'clock Miranda softly opened the door and brought in her breakfast tray. Mrs. Harney had fallen heir to Miranda on Madame Boulanger's death, and considered herself fortunate in having the efficient, reliable girl in her employ, but Miranda was more like Zelda's personal maid than anything else at "Harney-cool." There was a conspiracy afoot, the visitor repeatedly declared, to make her comfortable and beguile the time. The thought that went into ministering to her needs, the trouble that was taken for her comfort took on the complexion of a plot. The entire household, it seemed to her, circled around her, waiting on her moods and wishes. All very subtly managed. Mrs. Harney was too clever and experienced a hostess to let her guest glimpse the machinery, to peek behind the scenes. But Zelda was clever too, and it was impossible to believe, as week succeeded week, that every large and little circumstance which contributed to her pleasure was the result of happy accident.

"Ah, you're much, much too good to me," she was moved to say with feeling in her voice. Mrs. Harney smiled affectionatly and laid a hand on hers.

"What should we do without you, my dear? I'm under far greater obligations to you than you have any cause to be to me. Forgive an old woman who finds pleasure in doing what she likes."

One evening there was a guest for dinner.

"A friend of the family who is coming down from New York to spend the night," Mrs. Harney told

her. But when Zelda, arrayed in her prettiest frock, entered the drawing-room a little before the dinner hour, her heart stood still, on being introduced to the white-haired, white-bearded distinguished gentleman, to learn he was Judge Chesebrough.

All through the meal she sat and played her usual part, but as soon as it was over, she pleaded headache, went upstairs to her room, shut and locked the door.

"Now what?" she asked of the empty chamber.

Clever Mrs. Harney! Scheming Mrs. Harney! No, that was not fair. Tom's mother had only her son and his happiness in mind, and in her loving plot for him, Judge Chesebrough was the man to point out and smooth the way.

Divorce,—freedom from George,—an end to being "Mrs. Petersen,"—Reno for half a year,—remarriage, —"Mrs. Thomas Matthew Harney,"—and after that the long road of fear, lest the spectre of the past should rise and hold her a second time to account! Always to be hounded by that fear!

The panorama unrolled before her.

Ah, no, she could not deceive these gentle, kindly people,—she could not let herself in for any such agony of suspense.

But what alternative?

Toward ten o'clock the moon rose and blazed a silvery, white pattern on the floor, the frogs shrilled along the river bank, an owl hooted from the distant woods. She heard the men come out of the house, heard the crunch of their slow steps on the gravel of the driveway, and caught the scent of their cigars; then Mrs. Harney's pleasant voice bidding them good night, and presently their own leave-taking. The front door being shut and locked, the light over the driveway extinguished, Tom's firm tread upon the stairs, a door closing, muffled movement here and there within the house, then silence,—silence. Only the ceaseless shrilling of the frogs, the dismal hooting of the owl through

the long wakeful hours, while the patch of silvery light upon the floor crept inch by inch the length of the room, narrowed, narrowed, lessened to a thin streak, and vanished as the pale pink of morning broke upon the world.

§ 2

Her white night gave her a real excuse for remaining in bed next day although sleep continued to elude her, and it was mid-afternoon, when she was informed by Miranda that Judge Chesebrough had gone back to New York, before she made an appearance.

A quiet, subdued Zelda, a pale, preoccupied Zelda, moved from living-room to side porch, from davenport to swing couch, and finally wandered down to the river, rowed herself across to where willows trailed their branches, teased some darting, hungry minnows with a straw and, returning toward evening, assured her solicitous hostess as convincingly as she was able that nothing was amiss.

Another night of glory was upon them as day ended. Dinner was late and was served by candle light on the porch, where it was cool, and where the fragrance of the honeysuckle hung heavy. Moths fluttered their wings against the protecting screening, and buzzing insects battered their hard-shelled bodies against it with sharp "pinging" sounds. The butler moved from elbow to elbow offering cold meats, salad, iced drinks and iced dessert. There were roses on the table and the sparkle of silver, polished glass and fine china. With the appearance of the coffee, the moon rose, a giant disk, spectacularly large, shining luminously through a black pattern of oak leaves.

Tom was in a joyous mood. A telegram from Henry Meserve had been telephoned from the village just before dinner,—a long and satisfactory message. The changes made at the manager's request had proven

acceptable; he was delighted with the new third act, and sent his congratulations. "Will start casting immediately and need you in New York at once. Rehearsals week after next. Plan to open Stamford September fifth. My love to Zelda and tell her I hope these arrangements suit."

"That means," Tom cried in an excited voice, "I leave here to-morrow, or the next day at the latest, and much will have happened to this young genius before 'Harneycool' sees his smiling face again."

"I shall have to go too, I suppose," Zelda said slowly; "perhaps not so soon, but if he's going to begin rehearsals week after next . . . ! It's hard to believe the summer's over."

"It's far from over," John protested, "we'll have weeks and weeks of hot weather yet."

"Then you can stay here and enjoy them, Uncle mine."

"Well, we shall have to begin thinking about breaking up here," Mrs. Harney observed. "September fifth, I fancy, will see this old lady in Stamford. But it *is* sad to realize our stay here is nearly over; we've all been so happy. I declare, I think this has been the happiest summer of my life."

"It's been mine," Zelda agreed.

"And mine," Tom added, his eyes drifting towards her.

"Mine too," John chimed in.

They all laughed with this, but each was conscious of a pang of sadness. As they rose, Tom opened the screen door and stepped out on the strip of lawn that edged its way up to it.

"It's simply *mar*velous out here," he called, but only Zelda heard him. The others had gone into the drawing-room. She joined him and together they looked up at the moon that hung poised in the sky like a huge white drum.

"Suppose that's the harvest moon?" Tom asked.

"Hardly," she answered doubtfully, "the harvest moon comes at harvest time, doesn't it?"

"And when's that?"

"How should I know?" she laughed. "Don't ask a Californian about harvest time; they harvest out there every month of the year."

"It looks like a kindly moon whether it's the harvest one or not."

"It's been kind to you," she told him, "you ought to be the happiest man in the world."

He did not answer but in his silence she felt his denial. She remembered the long, troubled hours of the night she had just lived through, and she, too, fell mute. They wandered out of the glitter of the moon into the shadow beneath the oaks, and so down to the sunken garden with its dusty, clipped hedge, its gnarled rose bushes, its phlox and gillyflowers, its gay herbaceous borders. The moon reigned royally here, the night was warm, the fragrance of blooms and foliage scented the air. They sat upon an iron bench, and from a handful of gravel he had scooped up from the path, Tom tossed pebbles into the shallow pool. Neither broke the spell that had come to them. Sad and somber thoughts possessed both; each felt the other's dark preoccupation. After a long time, Tom asked,

"Why did you go upstairs and stay in your room while Judge Chesebrough was here?"

She drew breath, but made no answer.

"Why did you?" he persisted.

When still she did not reply, he said gloomily:

"I suppose that means that's an end to all my hopes."

A pebble from his fingers plopped into the pool and the widening circles gave back the moon's cold radiance. A soft breath in the night brought the illusive perfume of fallen rose leaves.

"Tom," Zelda said, sighing deeply, "can't you give up thoughts of me?"

It was his turn not to answer.

"I'm not worthy to be your wife," she said with effort, "even if I were free."

"That can't be so," he said sharply. Tenseness held them.

"Zelda, Zelda!" he burst out, "I cannot go on without you! You are the beginning and the end of everything for me; your smile, your laugh, your voice, are all I live for. Why, why, *why,* can't you forget the past and face the future with me?" He turned on her passionately, but there was no response.

With trembling fingers he took one of the white hands that lay limply in her lap.

"I've been good, I've been good," he repeated boyishly, "I haven't bothered you. Now we're going back to the city and things and people are going to come between us. I shall never see you. You'll be pulled one way, I another. Oh, I can't bear to give you up!

"These last few weeks down here," he went on after a moment, "have been like heaven to me. They've been *mar*velous weeks, Zelda, haven't they?

"Haven't they?" he insisted bending closer. His hand along the bench found her shoulder and he drew her to him, his breath fanning her cheek. "Darling, say they've been happy,—happy for you as well as for me. We've all lived together so harmoniously, in such good comradeship. I know you've loved them. . . . Listen, Zelda, you *do* like me—a little. Why can't we go on together? You're everything I've ever dreamed of,—my heart, my head tell me we were made for one another. Won't you consider it, Zelda? Won't you make me happy, make Mother happy, Uncle John? What stands between us but the shadowy figure of a man who may be dead, or may be as eager to be free from you as you are from him?"

She moved her head slowly from side to side.

"It can't be, Tom," she said sadly.

He continued eagerly, "I talked to Judge Chesebrough while he was here, Mother had written giving

him some idea of why she wanted him to come down; I explained to him as best I could what little I knew of your predicament. I know divorce is not the most agreeable experience in the world for a woman, but it happens that circumstances make it easier than usual in your case. We're in Pennsylvania and the laws in this State are more lenient regarding divorce than in some others. All you have to do is to establish your legal residence here in the village and leave the rest to the Judge. It's simple, it's easy. You have only to rent a room at Mrs. D'Arcy's Inn in the village, keep it for a year, and call it your home. While in New York, you're there pursuing your livelihood, and the law does not concern itself where you spend your time on matters of business so long as this remains your home. All that, Judge Chesebrough says he can arrange, and everything will be done with a minimum of trouble or distress to you. . . ."

His voice trailed off, and ceased before her impatient headshake. Facing her more squarely, he asked,

"Tell me, do you still feel affection for this man?"

He waited for her answer and had to bend his ear to catch her words.

"He means less than nothing to me."

"Is there any reason why you don't wish to divorce him?"

"None."

"Then the trouble is not with him but with me?"

She nodded.

"You don't care enough, is that it?"

Her whisper was barely audible.

"Too much, I fear."

"Zelda!" He caught her in his arms.

She struggled, but he held her firmly and for a moment overbore her strength with his own. Their faces were close together and her eyes looked deep into his. He lifted his mouth but she resisted him.

"Don't—*please,*" she begged, "I'm trying——"

He silenced her with a kiss. Wilting, she gave herself to him, feeling his strong arms about her, his breast beating against hers, his lips trembling on her own.

Then with a wrench she pushed him from her.

"No, no," she cried, "I love you too well for this, Tom; I *won't* spoil our friendship! We've had a great adventure together, you and I, and more adventure awaits us. You've written a fine play and I'm to play the leading rôle in it. We are in for either a great failure or a great success. I believe with all my heart it will be success. There are other years and other plays ahead and we'll try all sorts of experiments together—"

"Why not as man and wife?"

"Because—because," she said miserably, covering her face, "I'm not fit to be your wife,—or any man's."

"Zelda!"

"It is true. There were—there were others before I met my husband—"

"Zelda!"

"When he found out about me, he left me."

She bent forward, her fingers interlocked so tightly they trembled, and as she went on speaking, tears slowly gathered on her cheeks and dropped upon her clasped hands.

"I'm sorry this has come to us, but it's been no fault of mine." She hesitated a moment. "I don't know, maybe it has. I know I've struggled hard to avoid it. I tried to send you away, I tried to put you out of my life and take myself out of yours. Fate seems to have been against us, or maybe I'm just fooling myself and I haven't tried as hard as I think I have. . . .

"John knows all about me. I don't know how I happened to tell him, but I did. I told him the whole story one night soon after I came to Boulanger's. It was easy to tell him; I really wanted to, I remember. It's hard to tell you. . . .

"When I was seventeen, there was a boy. He was a year younger than I. He lived near me in San Francisco and we used to go to school together. I loved him, Tom. I loved him better than any man or anybody else I've ever known. He loved me too. We were just two kids yearning and hungering for each other, and neither of us knew anything about the whys and wherefors of life."

The history of those years came slowly, each incident wrung from her, but she spared herself no detail. She told of Michael, told of Boylston, and with shut eyes, even told of the time when she had divided her favors between them. Then came Michael's desertion, her escape from the physician, the Meserves, George, —George in marrying whom she felt she had been giving more than receiving. The vaudeville tour next, and she tried to make the man beside her realize the sordidness of her life during those months. Lastly the final chapter,—the race track and Emeryville, the gambling, the miserable hand-to-mouth existence, Gerry, the sacrifice of her child, the dreadful scene at parting, her illness, her descent into the valley of the shadow.

"Not only my body but my soul touched bottom then," she finished, speaking now more to herself than to him. "I went down, down, into the depths, and when the tide turned and I began slowly to come back, something new was born in me. I did not realize it at the time perhaps, but as I lay in my bed in that horrible hospital ward and realized that I must somehow piece my life together and go on, I made up my mind I'd build differently, and—and live differently, that I'd be a different woman. It seemed to me that all the people I had come in contact with, I'd made unhappy, or they'd made me so; every life I had touched, I'd either fouled or been fouled by. Pain and trouble. I've known them all my life and brought them to other people. There's a plague spot in me, I guess. I only

bring sorrow and bitterness to the men I've known or find it through them for myself. I rose from my hospital bed, determined that I should lead my own life from that time onward, that I was done with men, that I'd be myself, neither craving love nor giving it. I want no man to share in my affairs; it means only suffering for him and suffering for me."

Her voice ceased and for a time the only sound the night gave up was the shrilling of the frogs down by the river. The moon glutted the garden with dazzling splendor. Tom sat bowed, his hands clasping his temples, his eyes staring into the black pool at his feet. Presently Zelda resumed:

"You see, Tom dear, why it is impossible for me to marry you. No good would come of it. We won't talk of 'worthiness' or the lack of it, but you can see that I am not the woman you should marry. I'm not your kind. I belong to a different world. Whether or not I free myself from George, does not alter the situation. I am bound otherwise,—bound by old chains. You have only to think of your mother to realize how impossible a marriage between us is. . . . Ah well, it isn't your mother I am thinking of, nor what humiliation gossip about my past might some day bring you should you marry me, it's the feeling in my soul that I would bring you only misery in consenting to be your wife. I can't do it, Tom, I like you,—I love you too well,—you're too dear to me—"

Her voice broke sharply, and instantly he was on his knees before her, his arms about her.

"Don't tell me that you love me," he cried, "and yet I can not have you! What does it matter what you were, what kind of life you've led! It isn't the woman that you *were* I love; it's the woman you *are!*"

"Sssh, no—no." She tried to silence him but he would not heed her.

"None of us are saints, Zelda. I've lived my life, I've done rotten things, despicable things, ones I'd

give my soul to undo and forget. You don't blame me for them now; why should I blame you? I want you—I love you—"

"Tom! Stop—listen to me—"

"No, I've listened long enough! You listen to me. Your mind's all twisted by introspection and self-analysis. You're confused, dazed, you can't see straight—"

"You *must* listen," she insisted.

"*No!*" he answered her. They faced one another almost with defiance.

"I *won't* be cheated out of the girl I love," he went on before she could speak. "This is all rubbish you've been telling me,—rubbish because it has no bearing on whether or not you should marry me. You love me, you've said it, you've proved it. That's all I care about, —and breaking the damned legal tie that separates us. What has my mother to do with us, what has Uncle John, what has the world? I love you. Isn't that enough? You've told me all there is to tell about yourself, and now I tell you I want you for my wife!"

She covered his lips with her fingers and held them there until he was silenced.

"I will not let you say such things," she said, her face close to his. "Not to-night,—perhaps not at any time. You are chivalrous, Tom. I have learned to know what that word means only since I've met you. I will not let your chivalry trick you into saying more than you mean, or what to-morrow you may regret. Hush, dear, let me finish. This is exhausting me, exhausting you. It's moonlight, and the flowers are all about us scenting the air. There is madness here. Neither of us should be held accountable for what we do or say to-night. You know all there is to know about me, now. To-morrow you will see, as I do, that it would be folly for us to marry. It is far better for us to remain as we are. Hush! . . . You would not bring me unhappiness? You would not make me sorry that

I had married you? I would be, Tom, and you'd regret it, too. Oh yes, you would, I know, I know. I want to cling with all the strength I have to my new life that's brought me the only peace of mind I have ever known. Don't take this from me, Tom, don't rob me of something I hold more dear even than your love. I want to be myself—live my own life—independent—free—"

"Zelda," he demanded, "will you tell me one thing,—just one thing truthfully, so help you God? I must know; I have a *right* to know."

He waited and she turned her eyes to his.

"Do you love me?"

Her gaze searched his face, while she searched her heart for honest words to answer him.

"I don't know," she said.

"*Well, I do.*" He swept her to him in his arms.

"No, Tom, no. Please—please not to-night, not now. I will not have it. I will not let you say you love me. You don't know your mind, or know your heart. You are young,—we are in a garden,—there is moonlight. Stop! I will not have you commit yourself in this mad way on such a night of nights. . . . Ah, dear Tom, if you love me, listen a moment. Prove your love. Let me go. Wait until to-morrow,—some other time. Nothing you say to me to-night must bind you. Let me go. No more. Not another word. Not even good night. Let me find the house alone. Ah, Tom, *if you love me!* To-morrow we shall know our minds and see things as they are."

"To-morrow, I'll be gone."

"Well, we'll see each other soon again."

"Then let me have your promise before we part."

"Never. No—no—no."

"I'll wait a year—two years—eternity."

"It isn't that."

"What then?"

"I—I don't love you well enough."

"I know better. My heart tells me better."
"I don't want to marry you."
"It's not so,—you do."
"No."
"Yes."

Face to face they stood, holding each other by the arms, panting like runners in a race.

"You're killing me," Zelda suddenly said, brokenly. A ring of pain and weariness was in her voice. Instantly he released her, and sank dejectedly upon the bench.

For a moment she regarded him with tenderness. Then, with both her hands tightly pressed against her heart, she turned away and with rapid pace hurried toward the house, without a backward glance.

CHAPTER VII

§ 1

"Oh, Henry, Henry! . . . Listen to me calling you Henry!"

"You can call me anything you like to-night."

"Well, what do you think?"

"What do *you* think?"

"Do they like it?"

"Listen to them!"

The clamor broke out afresh. It was like the plunge of a cataract. Cries of "Author, author!" punctuated it.

"Oh, *where* is Tom!" wailed Zelda.

"Up with her again, Stephens. . . . House, house —douse your house!" Meserve called to the man at the switchboard. "Come on with your foots. God, man, don't be so slow! . . . Now, Stephens."

The curtain rose with a prolonged whirr.

"Me again?"

"Not yet; let 'em wait. You've gone to your dressing-room and you've had to be sent for, y'understand?"

The din rose to a sharper pitch.

"They won't wait!" Zelda cried in panic.

"They'll wait," Meserve said, confidently, detaining her. "Now!"

Leaving the wings she came on stage and stood in the avalanche of light that belched up, down, and from every side of her. The tumult swelled into a roar.

"Author! Author!" came from gallery and pit.

She smiled, an agitated, perplexed smile, took a hesitating step forward, and peered up into the bal-

cony where she knew Tom had been sitting. She could see nothing, but she hoped the house would guess for whom she sought.

"Author!" yelled the crowd, but Tom was nowhere.

Zelda blew a kiss to the radiant, white-haired woman in the box, and to John beside her, showing his wide flash of teeth, and beating his broad hands together like clashing cymbals, Judge Chesebrough was with them. She recognized Dean Farquharson's strong, aquiline face; he stood in the third row, a woman in a silver wrap next to him, both vigorously applauding. Zelda threw kisses right and left, tears of emotion wetting her cheeks. When she ran off, she fell, exhausted, into Henry Meserve's waiting arms.

"Oh—oh—" she panted; "they—they're too kind."

"Not one bit; it's coming to you. . . . Damn the critics; they always miss this enthusiasm. . . . Come on, they want you again."

"Oh no, not any more."

"Oh yes, as long as we can hold them." He signalled to Stephens.

"Come with me," she begged.

"Take this call and we'll hold the curtain, then I'll join you."

She went out once more alone. The aisles were blocked now with overcoats and evening wraps—furs, brocades. The tumult broke out again, rolling up to her in sharp crescendo.

"Author!" The cry was renewed.

It distressed her vastly to take this tribute that belonged to Tom. He had told her he would be hiding; now he ought to show himself. She made an honest effort to locate him but the lights dazzled her. Beckoning Meserve to join her, she finally ran to the wings and dragged the manager into view. He had made one appearance already,—a curtain speech after the third act,—had talked about the play, the new play-

wright, and about Zelda Marsh, the "scrub lady" who had now become "the drudge." A fresh outburst greeted him now, as, hand in hand, manager and star bowed and smiled, bowed to one another, bowed and smiled again.

"Author! Author!"

Meserve stepped forward and lifted his hand. The theatre quieted.

"Our blushing playwright cannot be located." His voice in conversational tones, sounded absurdly small after the general hubbub. "Somewhere he is in hiding. Miss Marsh tells me he found a seat for himself in the balcony or gallery to sit alone and watch his play. Probably he has already left the theatre, but I thank you in his behalf for your warm approval of his work which, I know, he feels with me, finds such adequate interpretation at the hands of this young lady at my side. We may all congratulate ourselves, I think, in having witnessed to-night a great actress in a great rôle."

Another wave of hand clapping welled up from the house. It was emptying now, but half the audience lingered, standing in the aisles and rows, applauding still, men pounding with their canes.

"Bravo! Bravo!" cried several voices.

"Well, that's enough," said Meserve as the curtain came rattling down; "let 'em go home."

"They liked it, then?" Zelda's laughing, excited eyes on his.

"My dear, it's a triumph."

She flung her arms about his neck and kissed him impulsively. Lifting her from her feet he returned the embrace.

"Oh, look!" She pointed to his cheek and coat daubed now with powder and grease paint.

"Proud of it, my dear. You've made me a very happy man to-night. Brought me luck ever since I've known you."

"Everything I am, I owe to you!"

The glance of affection and mutual regard between them lingered for a moment.

"Well, here come the hand-shakers. I'm off."

"But where's Tom?"

"God knows. Somebody's given him good advice. Good night. Bless you. Made a big name for yourself, mark my words."

He hurried away, pushing past those who would detain him. Miranda appeared at Zelda's side, holding her long coat.

"Oh, thank you," she said gratefully, "just what I wanted. . . . If I could have five minutes in my dressing room. . . ." She got no further. The congratulating throng was upon her, Nina first of all, stretching out both hands.

"My dear, my dear, perfectly wonderful! Glorious!"

Ralph Martingale: "Magnificent, Zelda. You'll be the talk of the town to-morrow. You've got a great play."

Carruth, saying nothing, reverently kissing her hand; Billy Winship, Maud de Reszke,—dear old Maud! —Paul and Hortense Macy, old Mrs. Kittredge, young Percy Carstairs, Dean Farquharson, himself, with no less a person on his arm than lovely Billie Vaughan, showing plainly her emotion, squeezing Zelda's hand. Dozens and dozens of others. Bates of "The Sun," Bigerstaff of "The Evening Mail," Stewart Kensington Smith, "Flash" Carleton, the cartoonist. Right and left her hands were caught and wrung; she was snatched from one conversation to begin another, was introduced, congratulated over again. Her face began to ache from smiling. Perspiration seeped through the grease paint and stood in drops on lip and forehead; her wig was awry.

At the outskirts of the crowd she caught sight of the tall figure, the white hair and beard of Judge

Chesebrough, and beside him next to John, Mrs. Harney's aristocratic, flushed face.

"Oh," gasped Zelda. She pushed through the throng, disregarding outstretched hands, to reach the elderly woman's side. Superb and queenly, Mrs. Harney looked, with her beautifully dressed hair, her jewelled throat, her cloak of ermine, the two big men like guardsmen standing on either side of her.

The women caught each other's hands.

"My dear!" Emotion shook Zelda's voice; tears misted Mrs. Harney's eyes. They clung together, too deeply moved to speak.

"I can't kiss you," Zelda whispered. "Where is he?"

The mother shook her head, smiling through blurred vision.

"You have every right to be proud, *proud*."

"It's you who've made him."

"Never. It's *you!*"

John, past speech, looking a trifle absurd as he blinked and grinned at her, took her hand into a mammoth paw.

"My dear Miss Marsh, I was at Stamford, and it's been my privilege to witness some of the rehearsals, but never have you given us such a performance as to-night's. You've made us all very proud and happy." Thus, Judge Chesebrough.

And then the mob intervened; Zelda had time only to throw one last kiss to Mrs. Harney. Pandemonium whirled around her. More people crowded in through the narrow stage entrance. Faces she had never seen before. The stage crew, anxious to be gone, began to strike the set, preparing for the morrow's matinée. Zelda was borne against the brick back of the building, the throng pressing after her; old friends, new friends, the whole world wanted to shake hands and felicitate her.

Her head grew giddy, her senses swam. It had been a long, exhausting, emotional day. No hour's rest, no

hour's peace. She looked about her for deliverance. There was none to rescue her. . . . More faces, more outstretched hands!

"Bless you, Zelda Marsh; you gave a great performance."

"Wonderful, Miss Marsh; I predict you'll be playing here a year from now."

"I want to present Mr. Leroy Gillespie of Mr. Seltzer's office who wants to make an engagement——"

"Miss Marsh, I want you to meet my father."

"Superb, Zelda, superb."

"Not since Charlotte Cushman's day, have I seen anything that moved me——"

"Zelda dear, this is Mr. Blum."

"Delightful performance, Miss Marsh. Heard a lot about your 'Jenny' of course. So dreadfully sorry to have been detained on the other side last year. You've quite captivated us to-night, you know."

Among others, a face she had not seen for half a score of years.

"'Member me, I hope, Zelda. Phil Godfrey of San Francisco? Used to be a neighbor of yours. Happened to be in New York and bribed my way in to see your opening. Great show, great——"

Oh, somebody must help her!

"Really—truly," she gasped. "You're all very kind, but you'll have to excuse me. I can't stand any more. Perhaps if I could get off some of this make-up. . . . Miranda! . . . Has anybody seen my maid?"

The group opened. Miranda's concerned black face; her strong arm about her. The ring of faces melted away. The short flight of iron steps down to her dressing room. The glare of light. Flowers, flowers. Their perfume dizzied Zelda, made her feel faint again.

"Throw them out,—shut the door."

She sank upon the narrow rattan couch and fell back against the head rest.

"The flowers—the flowers," she whispered. "Put them out; they're making me sick."

She closed her eyes, her hand across them to shield them from the brilliant shine of the electrics. Miranda moved briskly about the close, ill-ventilated room, carrying out sheaves, boxes and baskets of flowers. Zelda heard her telling somebody to put them in the car and take them to the hotel; the motor was to return immediately. Wonderful Miranda! Presently she felt the capable fingers unbuttoning the old worn shoes, so much too large for her, she had worn in the play.

"Now, com' on, Mis' Marsh, this here's just water, but you got to drink it and get some of that paint off you' face, and get home an' to bed."

Nobody like Miranda.

With an effort, Zelda roused herself, drank, and began to smear the cold cream on her tired face with thick scoopings. Delicious to feel her skin come clean as the towel freed her cheeks, her nose, the sockets of her eyes, her forehead from the gray paint. Her spirits rapidly revived.

"Great night, wasn't it, Miranda?"

"'Deed it was, Mis' Marsh, but you go on now and let me get you home. You got a matinée to-morrow and it ain't goin' to do you no good if you get you'self sick."

Zelda combed her thick mane and shook it free.

"Have they all gone?"

"Ah'll shoot 'em if they ain't."

Presently she was in her rightful clothes once more, her big fur coat about her. She climbed the short iron stairway, nodded good night to the one-armed man at the stage door, stepped gingerly across the precarious looking grille work that flagged the dark passageway to the street and gained the waiting car. No longer any need for haste or concealment; the mob had gone, the street was empty. Miranda got in beside her, slamming

the door shut. The car moved and, turning at the corner, nosed its way into Broadway's traffic. Leaning her head back against the cushions, Zelda closed her tired eyes.

It was over. Somebody said to-night that history had been made in the theatre; history at any rate had been made for her. She would always remember the opening night of "The Drudge." Other first nights she might know, but none would ever be as thrilling as this. She had the satisfaction too, of knowing she had played well; borne up with excitement, the tense interest of the audience, Tom watching, Henry watching, realizing all their hopes rested upon her, she had wrung new feeling out of her lines, thrown herself more passionately into the part; she had felt herself giving, gripping the audience. She hoped Tom thought so. Henry, at any rate, was pleased. She'd been better to-night than at the opening at Stamford; too nervous then, too uncertain, afraid to let herself go. Strain, strain, strain, three weeks of fearful strain,—Bridgeport, Paterson, Elizabeth, Newark,—half a week in each, with changes in script and changes in cast up to the very last minute. Monday they had rehearsed all day, Henry driving them until two o'clock in the morning, and to-day she had been too excited to eat, to read, rest or relax. Now she was tired, tired,—too tired to sleep she was afraid. A matinée to-morrow, another performance to-morrow night! How did actresses do it?

Entering the deserted foyer of her hotel, she noted with a distressed eye that the clock over the desk pointed to after one. As she hurried toward the elevator, a tall figure rose and intercepted her. With a joyful gasp, she recognized Tom.

"I had to see you to-night if only for a moment," he said. "What kept you?"

"The theatre! I've only just come from there. Couldn't get away. They mobbed me."

"What did Meserve think?"

"What everybody thought."

"And that was?"

"Why, Tom, where were you? Weren't you there? Didn't you see for yourself? Didn't you hear them calling for you?"

"I left before it was over. I couldn't stand it, I couldn't wait for the end."

"Oh, my dear!"

She led him to a recess behind some palms, her weariness forgotten. That he should have missed all the glory of the finish, seemed deplorable to her. As graphically as possible she described the triumph at the last, the curtain call after curtain call, the cries of "Author!", Meserve's speech, the riot in the house, the surge of people who had come "behind" to congratulate her.

"Your mother was there and John and Judge Chesebrough, oh, and a perfect jam of others, Dean Farquharson and Biggerstaff and Bates of 'The Sun' and I don't know who all! Everybody wanted you, everybody was asking for you. Where were you, Tom? You should have been there."

"I couldn't stand it, I tell you. I had to get out."

"Couldn't stand what?"

He leaned forward, dropping his head into his hands, then he wheeled on her.

"Zelda, Zelda, you don't know how really great you were to-night!" A sharp quaver in his voice stopped him for a moment. "I saw my play for the first time in my life. It wasn't my play at all; it was somebody else's,—I don't know whose! All I could see was just you,—you, the drudge,—you, the poor creature that life had mashed,—you with your dreams and illusions that nothing could take away from you! . . . Oh, maybe I'm talking like a fool; maybe, subconsciously, my own words thrilled me, but as I listened to you, I swear, Zelda, it didn't seem to me I *could* have

written them! . . . You were simply *mar*velous, and I am so—so—oh, so utterly undeserving of you."

Suddenly he slumped down on his knees beside her and buried his face. Her hand moved to his curling brown hair, touching it lightly, her own eyes filling.

"I'm glad you're pleased, Tom."

"Who wouldn't have been pleased!"

"After all it is your work, you did it,—I was only trying to be your brain child."

"That isn't so! That isn't right! And I know it!" he cried passionately. He raised his head, his hand over his heart. "I tell you I know," he repeated. "It's you in here. I couldn't have written a line of that play, I shall never write a line of *any* play without you. Ah, Zelda, it's you in me that makes me what I am. You *must* marry me, Zelda, you *must* promise me. You're food and drink and air to me, and without you I am nothing."

"Ssssh," she put her fingers on his mouth.

"Say yes, say you will, say you'll be my wife. This night, the opening of my play, and your success, let it be the night of our betrothal."

She had been smiling at his vehemence; now her face grew sober.

"You know how it is."

"Yes, yes, indeed I know how it is,—and I know that to-night as I sat hearing you breathe into my words, truth and beauty and fire and life, I realized that I love you better than anything and everything in the whole wide world! . . . Oh, Zelda, have me, take me!"

"But, Tom——"

"No no, no more 'buts.' Will you or won't you?"

"How can I?"

"You can promise me to-night, you can tell me you will be my wife."

"I am another's."

"You are now, but that will soon be ended. What's

a year to wait if between now and then you are my promised bride?"

"Don't use words like that!"

"Why not? Two hours ago I left the theatre with my heart choking, and I've been walking the streets ever since and waiting here. My mind's made up. I will not go to-night without your promise. I will not let you send me away or let you leave me as you did down in the country!"

"But have you thought?"

"Thought! To hell with thought! It's how I *feel!*"

She looked deep into his clear brown eyes, her hand upon his shoulder as he knelt before her, and suddenly all the doubt and fear and hesitancy of the long year faded away. She leaned a little toward him, he caught her into his arms, gathering her to him, and sank his mouth upon her upturned lips.

CHAPTER VIII

§ 1

"I NEVER get used to it, or tired of seeing it," Zelda said, peering up the congested street from the narrow angle afforded by the window.

"Get used to what?" Tom asked.

"My name in electric lights."

"You'd better hurry up then. It's been there for three months, will stay there another year, and Broadway will never know a theatrical season without it."

She laughed incredulously, but she liked his saying it.

"There're all sorts of ups and downs in this business," she reminded him. "As your Uncle John so neatly puts it 'One day you're up, the next you're down.' In any case," she finished, "I'll never have a better play."

"How about 'The Vixen'?"

"I don't like that name, Tom. I think your other one, 'The Camel's Eye,' is better."

"Henry says no."

"You leave Henry to me. If you want it, you can have it."

"I finished the rough draft yesterday. Must talk to you about it. . . . You think the idea's good?"

"I like it a lot; it has a great dramatic situation, but no play will ever mean to me what 'The Drudge' does. I love every minute I am playing it."

"Should think you'd get awfully tired putting that fearful make-up on every night."

"It's a chore, I'll admit. But it gets easier. I don't think about it any more. It's like doing your hair or getting dressed in the morning."

"Takes you half an hour, doesn't it?"

"Forty minutes to be exact. By the way, am I late? What time *is* it?"

They had been dining with his mother and Tom had asked to be given a lift down town. Zelda rented a car by the month now, a closed affair of somewhat ancient lines and make, but practical and comfortable, owned by Tony, the man who, in the days of "Jenny," had unfailingly met her and brought her home after the theatre.

Tom, answering her question, glanced at his wrist. "Quarter to eight."

"That's oceans. Stephens never rings up until eight-forty and I have five minutes after that——

"There it is!" she broke off abruptly. "Isn't it grand?"

He leaned across her to share the glimpse of the flashing sign above the entrance to the theatre.

ZELDA MARSH IN THE DRUDGE

"Long ago, I used to dream of it," Zelda mused. "Carriages and automobiles driving up to the curb, people swarming in. I never really thought it would happen to me, and now it never fails to give me a thrill. Only," she added with a frown, "it doesn't seem fair. . . ."

"What doesn't?"

"That your name isn't up there, too."

"Nobody gives a damn about the author," he observed cheerfully.

"But they should! What would I amount to as an actress if I didn't have a good play?"

"And what pray, Miss Marsh, would my play amount to if I didn't have a good actress?"

She laughed.

"We'll never come to any agreement about that!"

"The fact of the matter is, my dear, we can't get along without each other," he said slowly. "Don't you think it means a tremendous lot to me," he went on, "to see my future wife's name up there shining out to all the world?" They were now in front of the theatre, the car had come to a standstill, and he pointed to the blazing letters just above their heads.

She always grew serious when he talked of their future; he was so confident about it, but to her it seemed uncertain, even though she had consented to allow Judge Chesebrough to establish her legal residence in Pennsylvania. No thought or consideration for George troubled her. She was eager to be divorced from him. George did not matter. It was Tom who concerned her. That she should some day be his wife seemed more than she deserved. There was a lack of fitness about it somehow. She loved him, he was her friend, before all the world she placed him first. It was not that. She did not know what it was.

Now, as he leaned forward to see the sign, he kissed her, while both peered from the car's window. As he did so, a figure caught Zelda's eye, a figure in a shabby coat and slouch hat, a figure that stood with hands shoved deep into its pockets, full in the glare that shone from the theatre, a figure standing close to the easel that framed her many photographs, studying them, gazing from one to another and back again, a figure familiar and forlorn.

She stiffened as though electricity had shocked her; her hands flew to her throat.

"Wait," she gasped. The car jerked forward as the traffic moved. "Wait," she almost screamed.

"What is it, Zelda?"

"Can't you hear me?" she cried. "Tell Tony to wait, —slow up there,—stop."

"Why, what's the matter? He can't stop here."

"He *must,* I tell you."

She reached for the handle of the door as if she

would leap into the street. Tom caught her, rapping smartly on the front pane.

"Draw up there to the curb," he shouted to Tony.

Zelda, her face pressed flat against the car's window, peered back at the shabby figure still standing in the lobby of the theatre. The motor swerved to the corner and stopped. Again she struggled with the handle of the door.

"Zelda, Zelda, what is it? You mustn't get out. What can I do? Who is it that you see?"

"That man there,—looking at my pictures there in the lobby,—can you see him? Get him for me, Tom, bring him to me, don't let him get away. I'll wait at the stage entrance."

Tom leaped to the sidewalk, slammed the door, the car moved on, but Zelda, crouching on the back seat, clutching at the cushions with her nails, watched out of the small rear window. She saw Tom, saw him hurrying, saw the shabby figure glance round the brilliant foyer, saw him start to walk away, Tom breaking into a run, dodging here and there in pursuit. Then another motor car swept between and she could see no more.

Tony turned into the side street, proceeded another fifty yards, and drew up at the stage entrance. Immediately, he left his seat, came around from behind the car and opened the door, but Zelda did not descend. She leaned out, watching the white glare of Broadway and the corner at which the shabby figure and Tom must appear if they were coming. The seconds stretched to minutes, her heart wildly beating. Then suddenly she saw them, Tom's tall fine figure striding along beside the smaller, shabby one. Drawing her coat about her, she stepped out upon the sidewalk, waiting for them to join her. Off came their hats as they drew near, Tom lifting his with grace and manner, the other crushing his between his hands, grinning at her with a ghost of his old look.

"Michael!"

Still the embarrased, shifting, wrinkling smile! How changed he was!

"Michael!"

The street, the people surging past, Broadway a stone's throw distant, the automobile, Tony waiting, hand on door, Tom, author of "The Drudge," the play itself, the theatre calling her, all faded into gray. Alone remained the twitching features of this little man, thin of hair, sunken of cheek, whose blunted fingers clung to hers, whose nervous, smiling lips could find no words to answer her.

"I saw you," she said with difficulty, "in the lobby of the theatre, looking at the pictures."

He nodded, eyes shut to squinting slits.

"I didn't want to lose track of you."

Still he could only smile and blink.

"I sent Mr. Harney to catch you. I'd like to see you, —talk with you."

Only grin. After all, he did not need to speak.

She roused herself, remembering Tom.

"This is an old friend of mine, Tom,—an old San Francisco friend,—Michael Kirk. . . . You've seen the play, Michael?"

He shook his head. She frowned, considering. Again to Tom:

"Take him to the box office, will you? and get him a ticket. Tell them I insist that they find a seat for him." Once more to Michael:

"Come to me after it's over. I'll be waiting for you in my dressing room. My maid'll be on the lookout for you. We'll go somewhere then, and talk."

She left them quickly, losing herself in the shadow of the passage that led to the stage entrance. Miranda was waiting for her.

"Kinda late, Mis' Marsh," the maid warned her.

Zelda shed her clothes, jerked herself into a cotton wrapper, sat down before the mirror, and began vigor-

ously to smear her face with cream. Mechanically her hands flew from one part of the make-up process to another. In her heart she kept saying:

"Michael, little grinny-faced Michael,—Michael back again. . . . How old and tired and sick he looks!"

§ 2

"Well, what did you think of the play?"

"Oh, it's wonderful!"

"You liked it?"

"Sur-re."

She hoped he would speak of herself, and waited. She was disappointed.

"And did you like my part,—like me?"

"Of course. You're—you're great."

Embarrassment made him inarticulate. He was uncomfortable. She changed the subject.

"Tell me about yourself. I want to know everything that's happened to you since you left San Francisco."

"Nothing very thrilling," he said, with his nervous grin.

They were opposite one another at a table in a Broadway Rathskeller, a little table in a far corner where the music would not disturb them. Ordering substantially for herself, she did the same for him; he might be hungry,—he looked hungry. She knew what it meant to be hungry in New York. She noticed too, his lips were blue and cracked. Pain, want and failure lay behind his squinting, laughing eyes. Her heart contracted.

"Tell me," she said, "I want to hear."

"We went to Paris, you know, Mother and I."

"Yes, I knew that."

"We were over there two years and I studied at one of the *ateliers*. She wanted me to become an artist, you remember."

Zelda nodded.

"It was pretty nice at first. We had a small attic in the Quarter all to ourselves; Mother kept house and I went to school. She was awfully disappointed to find out she couldn't teach. Nobody thinks an American knows anything about music over there. She couldn't get any pupils. . . . You know, she liked to teach. . . . Well, we went to Munich for a visit, and while we were there I got sick and Mother got sick taking care of me." He paused and grinned at her in his tragic way. "She didn't get well."

Zelda's own face wrinkled. The prick of tears stung her eyes.

"I went back to Paris alone. There was a little money left. Guess I didn't appreciate how little,—nor how much. Anyway I didn't feel like working, the fun had gone out of it for me. I just hung 'round there, drifting along from day to day. There was a gang of us. I had lots of friends, and we had a good time. . . . Well, when the money gave out I came home, and I've been here ever since."

"How long's that been?"

"Two or three years."

"And what are you doing now?"

"Illustrating, advertising, any old thing that comes along."

"You haven't had a particularly easy time of it, have you?"

"Oh, I manage to get along."

She linked her fingers and upon her clasped hands, elbows on table, she leaned her head a moment. She knew he lied. The helplessness of the man,—boy to her,—reached out to her.

"Michael, where do you live?"

"Down on Charles Street." He gave her the number. "It's in the Village, but it's the deuce of a place to find."

"You live alone?"

He grinned.

"You aren't married, are you, Michael?"

"Oh no. I had a fellow living with me for a while. He's gone now."

"You're certain it was a 'fellow'?"

"Oh, sure." His whole face wrinkled.

"I care nothing about how you live or with whom; I only care about how you are. You seem ill to me."

"Got a cold, that's all."

"You're telling me the truth?"

"Sur-re."

She was not convinced. Something was wrong. She looked at his hands, blunted, terrible hands they were, broken of nail, torn of flesh, stained and none too clean. The soft collar about his neck was soiled. His shirt had worn thin; there was a frayed hole in it beneath his rusty black cravat.

"Eat your supper," she directed, "or it will get cold. I won't ask any more questions. I'll tell you my story for a change."

She skimmed through her history,—the Meserves, George, vaudeville, New York, "Jenny," "The Drudge."

"I suppose you're interested in my marriage. It wasn't a success." She gave him some idea of what it had been like.

"Now it doesn't seem to matter much one way or another. My husband's name was George Selby. I haven't seen him nor heard of him for two years. He may be dead for all I know. Anyhow, I'm planning to get a divorce."

"You've been tremendously successful, haven't you?"

"Lucky would be more accurate."

"I read about you last year."

"Did you see the play?"

He shook his head. She was incredulous.

"You didn't see 'Jenny'?"

He confessed he had not.

"I should think," she said slowly, "you would have gone to see it just to have had a look at me. . . . And when you knew where I was," she went on, her brows knitting, "I should think you would have made an effort to get in touch with me. Didn't you care anything about seeing me again, Michael?"

"Sur-re, but . . ."

"But what?"

"Oh, what would have been the good? You didn't want to see me."

"How do you know?"

"Well—shucks! It never occurred to me that you would."

"Weren't you the least bit curious to see me on the stage, to see what I looked like?"

"Sur-re. . . ."

"But not enough to buy a gallery seat?"

He hung his head, twisting his jaw from side to side, an old trick of his, she remembered, when he had been at fault and she had scolded him.

"Well, never mind about that now; go ahead and eat."

She reached for a cigarette and lit it.

Blowing out a thin plume of smoke, she stared up at the glittering electrolier above her head. Her eyes came back to him after a moment and she watched him as he bent over his plate. Pathetic—hungry—ill—improvident! She blinked up at the lights again.

"Tell me about yourself," she said presently. "How do you live? What do you do with yourself?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, how do you make your living? How do you go about getting work?" A thought of John and the way he had lugged his china mugs about, carrying them in the old big, black valise from place to place. Mrs. Harney had changed all that. He lived now on a modest income she furnished, dabbling with his paints and brushes for amusement.

"I go about to the magazine offices and advertising agencies and ask for jobs," Michael told her.

"It's rather precarious, isn't it?"

"Sometimes, but I get along."

He would not confide in her. Well, what was the need? She could see for herself it was precarious.

"Michael, didn't you ever think of me after you left San Francisco?"

"Of course."

"Why didn't you write me? Why didn't you let me hear from you? You knew my address."

He hung his head like the schoolboy she remembered.

"Tell me," she insisted, "why didn't you?"

"I don't know,—too ashamed, I guess."

"Because you had gone away without telling me?"

His dark expression answered her.

"That was pretty bad," Zelda said, "but if you'd written, if you'd sent me some kind of message—anything—you'd have saved us both much pain and misery."

He squirmed unhappily in his seat. She recalled how acutely he suffered with remorse when it possessed him. Excruciating for a time,—then gone,—then cheerful, buoyant optimism once more, as if nothing had been amiss. She was in no mood to make him uncomfortable to-night. Reaching across the table, she laid a hand on his.

"No use feeling badly now, Michael. It's better to have met even at this late date, than never to have met at all, don't you think?"

He shut his wrinkled eyes and drove the heels of his palms into their sockets. His words came from wretched depths.

"I've thought of you all these years. I've always hated to remember how rottenly I treated you."

"Never mind." She was all compassion now.

"Don't think I haven't blamed myself. . . . I loved you, you know I did."

"Hush—hush, Michael, don't say things like that."
"But you know I loved you!"
"But you mustn't say it."
"But I did, I did."
"Oh, my God—my God!"
"Oh, I'm not worth a tinker's dam."

She wrung her hands beneath the table, and bit her folded lips until pain brought sanity and self-control. . . . Madness—madness this! . . . She sank back in her chair, a breath of utter weariness escaping her. What use to regret? Why repine? It was all so long ago, all part of the past, never to be revived, never to be lived again! Gone, gone, gone. Buried in lavender and dried rose leaves. . . . Somebody had used that expression to her the other day.

Her gaze, roving abstractedly about the garish restaurant, now was caught by the waiter, hovering near, and flourishing a napkin to attract her attention; he had the check to present, was anxious to be off, the hour was late, the Rathskeller nearly empty. She beckoned him, handed him a bill and rose.

"Come, my car is waiting. I'll take you home."
"I'm 'way down town," Michael protested.
"Come," she repeated and led the way upstairs.

All the many blocks to Charles Street, they sat side by side with barely an exchange. Zelda leaned into a corner of the car, and stared out at the lights and blocks of dark houses that flashed and hurtled past. A sense of the lost and empty years, the futility and profitlessness of her own life and of his oppressed her. What was the use of work and effort,—what was the use of anything?

The car slowed, Michael rapped on the glass, indicated a turning and presently where to stop.

"It isn't so hard to find if you know the Village," he said. His voice startled her. It brought back vividly the Michael of old, the Michael of the cheery grin and wrinking face, the Michael she remembered, young, well and strong.

She peered up at the narrow brick house, noting its utter commonplaceness.

"This is where you live?"

"Yes, at the top. I'm three flights up."

She hesitated.

"Could I come up?"

"You mean now?"

"Yes. Wouldn't it be all right for me to see your quarters?"

"They're pretty dirty."

"Oh, I don't mind dirt."

"The room's in a good deal of confusion."

"Heavens, Michael, I've been in your room before! I know what a careless, slovenly creature you are."

"I know—but—er. . . ." He floundered helplessly. He did not want her to come up.

"Well-l-l. . . ."she said hesitatingly and paused; then:

"When am I to see you again? We've still a lot to talk about."

"Any time. I haven't much to do."

She wondered if he were in need. Would he accept a bill? Her gold-mesh purse had thirty, forty dollars in it. She wanted so much to help him.

"How about lunch to-morrow? Come to my hotel; how would that do? I'll have something served upstairs so that we can talk."

"Sur-re, that would be fine."

"At one?" She gave him the address, and told him carefully how to reach the place.

Still she was reluctant to part from him. He stood beside the car's open door, his old hat crushed within his hands, his shabby coat collar turned up about his neck.

"Well-l-l,—good night." She lingered on the words.

"Good night."

"It's been fun to find each other again."

"Yes, indeed. You bet."

"To-morrow at one?"

"Sur-re." He closed the door and waved his crumpled hat,—the old, little man, travesty of boy, whom once she had loved so dearly!

The car moved, slid away from the sidewalk. She looked back and watched him entering the house.

§ 3

Michael—Michael—Michael!

Her eyes swept her room's white ceiling. Michael home again,—so deplorable, so helpless, so much in need!

She could not sleep. She was possessed by thoughts of him. The handsome, winning boy whose arms had held her, whose clean, young lips had kissed her many times, to whom she had surrendered the full flower of her first love and maidenhood, had now become this shrunken, wasted, insignificant little man! She guessed what part loose living had played in his degeneration. Easy going, loveable, affectionate, good natured, anxious to please and to be liked, the very sweetness of his nature had been his undoing. Drifting, drifting, always taking the easier course, always choosing the less disagreeable way. . . . Weak, but God, how loveable! . . . And she could have saved him, kept his love and made him strong and self-respecting, made a man of him! Mad, selfish mother that he'd had! She, Zelda, would have slaved for him, labored for him, brought him the success of which Mrs. Kirk had fondly dreamed! . . . Now it was too late—too late!

In the dark, she pressed her knuckles to her mouth.

Her dead love. How precious it still was to her!

Too late! Too late!

"I cannot stand this!" she cried aloud. "Sleep, I've got to sleep. I'll be a wreck to-morrow, if I don't!"

Her hand groped for the light beside her bed and jerked its chain. In the bathroom's medicine cabinet she

searched among the bottles and the boxes for some veronal. Miranda dissolved the pellet in hot milk, but at that late hour there was no hope of milk, hot nor cold. Zelda crunched the bitter pill between her teeth and went back to bed.

Tom,—what of Tom? her whirling thoughts began again. Did he remember Michael's name, the name she had told him on that moonlit night in the sunken garden? Had he identified the shabby looking little man? If so, what must he think? If not, the circumstances of the meeting must have struck him as peculiar.

What should she do? How explain?

In any event there was comfort in the thought she had not deceived him. Not at any time. No danger of a repetition of the scene with George. Tom knew about Michael. Surely he would understand her interest, and sympathize with her for her concern. . . . Would he? . . . Would he appreciate just how? . . .

She fell asleep.

§ 4

Morning broke. A thin drizzle of cold rain dripped wetly on the city. Miranda, moving carefully about the room, woke her mistress in spite of her caution. Zelda's eyes felt gummy, her head ached. A glance at the painted china clock,—John's handiwork,—brought consternation. Twelve already! She struggled up, feeling with bare feet for the satin mules beneath the bed.

"Goodness, Miranda!" she exclaimed thickly, "you let me sleep! I've a luncheon engagement at one."

"Don't think so, Mis' Marsh. Gentleman 'phoned he couldn't come. Ah took the message downstairs,—'Ah tole 'em not to ring you' bell. He says he was mighty sorry but he couldn't come."

"Couldn't come?"

"Yes'm."

"Was that all?"

"Yes'm, that was all. He jus' says he was mighty sorry an' couldn't come."

"Gave his name, did he?"

"Yes'm. Mistah Kirk,—or maybe it was Church."

Zelda stared, one hand lightly on her own white throat.

"It was Kirk," she said weakly.

She sank back upon the pillows and bit her lip.

§ 5

Two drab, empty days dragged by. No word nor sign from Michael. Surely she must hear from him, surely he would write!

She saw Tom, and Tom was, as always, devoted, tender, adoring. No slightest reference to the shabby man in the shabby overcoat he had jumped out of the car to bring to her. The trouble in her eyes and in her face betrayed itself in spite of all her efforts to keep it hidden. Mrs. Harney spoke of it; nothing from Tom, nor even John. The men watched her. Zelda felt their concerned regard, but neither questioned her.

With Tom, she was especially affectionate, giving him kiss for kiss, hug for hug. She wanted him to understand that nothing was amiss between himself and her. In his arms and from his lips, she found a sweet quality of comfort. . . . Dear Tom! Before all the world, he was her friend, and champion.

And yet no sign from Michael. She wearied herself with surmises. Why didn't he write? Why didn't he telephone? What reason kept him silent? Hadn't he been glad to see her? Didn't he want to meet her again? She had no wish to complicate his life; she wanted to help, to make things a little easier, a little happier for him, no more.

Her heart battled with her pride.

She wrote a letter, tore it up, drafted a second, destroyed that as well, composed a third, sealed, ad-

dressed and stamped it, then studied the square, brown envelope as it lay before her. With sudden impulse, she peeled off the stamp and rubbed the sticky corner with a hasty finger. Sending it by hand was the better, quicker way. She could trust Miranda. While she was playing the matinée, the maid could go with Tony in the car and deliver it.

§ 6

Take my health and take my work, take from me all I've got in life,—my friends, the folks I love,—you can't take my dreams away from me. I live up there; you live down here. Drudge, am I? You little know. Kit, she knows, and Barry too. I've got a lover, I have! You didn't know that, hey? A lover who loves me with a better love than you will ever know. And he's a prince too,—a prince in silks and velvet, with a crown upon his head, and God Himself is not more beautiful!

She choked upon her lines, and Wescott, playing opposite, looked sharply, fearing she was ill. Devastating to try to put vitality into her work, when all her thoughts were elsewhere.

At the end of the third act, she found Miranda waiting for her.

"Well?"

"War-rent nobody home, Mis' Marsh. Ah rang the bell but Ah don't hear no sound, an' so Ah tries the door and shure enuf, it opens and I goes up-stai's. It's a mighty dirty place, Mis' Marsh. There's doors on each flo', an' some of 'em got names on 'em. But Ah don't see no Mr. Kirk's name. You tells me he's on the fou'th flo,' so Ah knocks there, an' an ugly lookin' man comes out. He ain't got no collar on, and he ain't shaved hisself fo' pretty nigh a week. He just point his finger at the other door, an' there Ah knocks and knocks, but nobody says 'Come in.' So Ah sticks the letter in the crack and comes away."

"That was right, Miranda, that was just right. Thanks so much."

Right but so unsatisfactory!

She must wait, but something had gone wrong. She felt it.

"This is ridiculous!" said she with impatience, intensely annoyed with herself. "Why should I care if he doesn't want to see me? I've run after him all my life, and he isn't worth it. He doesn't deserve a good friend. After all, what have I to do with him?"

Early the next morning she telephoned Tom.

"Tom, dear, how far is it to 'Harneycool'?"

"About a hundred and twenty miles."

"Could you drive there and back in one day?"

"Certainly."

"Could you surely get me back to the theatre by seven o'clock?"

"Absolutely. Leave here at nine, get there at one, leave there at three, back here at seven. Easy."

"Tom dear, I want to go."

"When?"

"To-day."

"*Mar*velous!"

"Would you really like to take me?"

"Zelda, you're crazy! You know I'd adore it."

"I need the country, I need to get the smoke of the city out of my lungs. Winter'll be here 'most any time. The leaves are gone, but the air's like wine and I'd love the dash with you. Fun to see how fast we could make it. You don't mind being arrested, do you?" She laughed happily. "Anyhow, I want to go and just say 'Hello' to Mrs. D'Arcy. Judge Chesebrough said I ought to appear there once in a while,—perhaps mail a letter, he said, as evidence I was there. . . . I'll be writing the letter and it'll be to you, and if you'll get the car over here in a hurry, I promise you'll find something nice in it."

"Darling!"

"You'll hurry?"

"Be there in twenty minutes. Want my raccoon coat?"

"What will you wear?"

"Sweater and ulster."

"Love it. . . .Tom, you're *such* a dear!"

" 'We strive to please!' " he quoted joyously.

§ 7

A pale, brassy sun shone glitteringly all day. The air was nimble, cold, exhilarating. Zelda, huddling close beside her charioteer, watched mile after mile whip past, and disappear beneath the roadster's flying wheels. At Crosswicks they stopped for coffee and bakery doughnuts, drank deep, munched hungrily, and were off again, laughing, chattering, arguing over the new play, tearing scenes to pieces, building new ones, planning the future, what they should do when they were married, trips abroad each summer, a villa above Taormina where they would work, Paris, Vienna, Florence, Rome, the cities Tom knew best, the theatres, cafés, resorts he loved, all these he would show her and she would come to know and love them too.

She leaned her fur-capped head against his arm and sighed with deep content. She was not good enough for this fine, clean man, but she would make it up to him in loving devotion; a good wife she'd be to him, and they would have glorious adventures together,—one play following another, and the time would come when they would produce these themselves, how and when they pleased. When a play by Thomas Matthew Harney was announced with his wife, Zelda Marsh, heading the cast, New York would wait with bated breath to see and hear it, and the theatre, their own too, would be the finest in the city and every night crowded to its doors.

Dreams, dreams, wonderful dreams. They vied with one another in extravagant imaginings.

"Sweetheart," Tom expostulated, "it's going to be simply *mar*velous of course, but we'll have our set-backs and our failures."

" 'You can't take my dreams away from me,' " Zelda quoted and won a laugh.

Jonas welcomed them at "Harneycool." The dear, beloved place seemed drained of color and of life. The trees stood stark and bare, their black, denuded limbs twisted as in pain. The beds of gillyflowers lay crushed where frost had killed them; the sunken garden was now a devastated place where phlox and asters, bent and broken, sagged drunkenly to the ground.

"I cannot bear it," Zelda shuddered. "I've been thinking of it ever since we left, as a place of perfect beauty and serenity. Makes me sick to see it now. It's almost like a symbol of life,—the futility and uselessness of everything; no matter how we try to build and make things beautiful, they all come to look like this! . . . Oh, let's go, Tom, let's go to D'Arcy's, open and lock my trunk, say 'hello,' mail my letter, and start for home. I loved the drive but 'Harneycool' in summertime, if you please."

Weary, dusty, but happy, she reached her hotel, and kissed Tom good-bye. Not until she met Miranda's eyes and saw there was no message for her, did she realize how all day she had been hoping there would be one.

Again she said:

"This is ridiculous!" adding, "The boy is sick, in trouble; he's too shy, too sensitive. I'll lose him unless I put my pride in my pocket and go after him."

She ordered the car at eleven next day, and drove to Charles Street alone. When they reached the house she sent Tony upstairs while she waited in the motor. Peering up at its façade from the sharp angle below, she could just see the curtainless windows at the top. A flowerless flower pot on the window sill. Nothing more.

"Gentleman says he'll be right down," Tony reported.

She settled back in the car, her heart moving to a faster beat. She'd see him now! He was coming! But the seconds ticked to minutes and the minutes multiplied before he appeared, opening the house door with a quick jerk, and coming, pale and haggard with his wrinkled grin, to stand beside the car.

"Hello!" His voice was hoarse. Immediately he began to cough.

"You've been sick!"

"Cold, that's all." He tapped his chest.

The shabby overcoat was frayed, the binding white, the buttons gone. She looked at him closely. Unkempt, unhappy, unwell!

"Oh, get in," she said with brusqueness. A wind was blowing, it ruffled his hair and showed where it was thin. She took his maimed and grimy hands in her neat tan-gloved ones as he seated himself beside her.

"Michael, what's been the matter?"

He wrinkled, grinning, blinking. . . . That sickly smile!

She studied him before she spoke again, her eyes on his, trying to read him; his own gaze shifted, came back to hers, warmed beneath her searching look.

"Why have you avoided me?"

"I haven't,—honestly, I haven't."

"Why didn't you come to lunch?"

"I had a call from an advertising agency; they wanted some lettering done in a hurry. I telephoned. Didn't your maid give you my message? Had to get the work out in a hurry,—honestly, Zelda."

"Why didn't you answer my note?"

"I was going to."

"You haven't telephoned, you've sent no message."

"I—I didn't want to bother you, that's all."

"You wouldn't have bothered me, and you know it."

"Well, I . . . I've been laid up with a cold."

"You could have scribbled me a postal, or had some friend telephone."

His jaw began to waggle; he looked miserable. She tightened her lips, and suddenly, her heart melting, she wanted to take him in her arms.

"Come," she said, "what about lunch. Are you free?"

"Sur-re,—haven't a thing to do."

"It's early yet, but we don't mind, do we? Anyhow I'm hungry," she lied. "Let's go to the Brevoort and eat downstairs in one of those rooms off the street."

"Fine," he agreed. She spoke to Tony and a few minutes later just as the sirens and whistles were blowing the noon hour, they settled themselves at a window table in the French hotel.

They discussed what they would eat.

"Let's have some white wine and seltzer, *avec de citron,*" Michael suggested. "I used to love that in Paris; we used to drink it all the time."

"And cocktails?"

"Cocktails by all means," he grinned enthusiastically. He drained his appetizer when it came, almost at a gulp, and she persuaded him to finish hers and ordered more. The liquor warmed him, he grew cheerful, talkative, a tinge of color crept into his pasty cheeks; an echo of the old happy ring sounded in his laugh as they talked of San Francisco days.

"Remember how frightened we were that time the tramp met us?"

"You mean that day it was so foggy up on Holliday's Hill, and you and I really thought we were lost?"

"I'll never forget it. You were scared!"

"You bet I was. I used to think when I was a kid, that spooks lived in that house." He continued:

"Oh, and do you remember the night we swiped the freezer of ice cream from the Presbyterian Sunday School?"

Zelda burst into a gale of mirth and had to check

herself, a hand upon her eyes. It was a moment before she could speak.

"My dear, my dear! I'd almost forgotten. . . . And do you remember what a terrible time we had getting rid of the freezer? 'Incriminating evidence' you called it."

"What did you do with it?"

"I think Val Schmidt got it!"

They rocked with joy. Michael beamed, glowed, forgot himself, forgot his poverty, his unkemptness. He ate, drank, laughed,—and coughed, a deep rending cough that seemed to tear his very vitals. His paroxysms affected her like blows, yet she hesitated to speak of them, fearing to rout this happy mood.

"Michael, do you remember the time the man threw the milk bottle at the cats that were squalling in your back yard, and how it banged on the top of your studio and frightened us out of our wits?"

"And we were scared that Mother'd hear?"

"Goodness! What days, what thrilling days those were!"

On this, they both fell silent.

Time passed. The restaurant filled, emptied, and still they talked on and on. Michael begged for *café diabolo,* and Zelda who had never seen the process, was fascinated watching it. He asked for cognac too, and showed her how to melt a lump of sugar in its flame.

Michael and Paris. She wondered what his life had been there. Some quality of France had seeped into his blood; he had a Frenchman's point of view. When he spoke to their waiter in his native tongue, his fluency enchanted her.

Still he baffled her. Those neglected hands, stained with dirt and cigarettes, tore like talons at her heart.

Oh, Michael, Michael, where was he, the grinny-faced, happy Michael she had known? Some semblance of the boy sat opposite her now. Soon he would be gone, lost again.

Tony drove them up the thronging Avenue in the long line of traffic of the winter afternoon, and at the Plaza, turned into the Park, where they slowly followed the curving boulevards beneath the leafless trees. The wisp of wind that earlier in the day had ruffled Michael's thin hair, had now turned raw and gusty with the first real sting of winter. Pedestrians plunged their hands deep into the pockets of their coats, or for a moment drew them forth to cup their tingling ears, while puffs of vapor marked their breaths. But in the car, beneath the robe that covered them, Zelda and Michael were warm, deliciously content. Against her soft fur collar he leaned his head, and on the seat between them their hands lay linked, her small ungloved fingers now within his torn, mistreated ones.

When the round lamps along the Mall bloomed softly alight in the gathering purple twilight, Zelda grew conscious of the waning hour. She moved, slipped her arm about him, drew him to her and kissed the cracked, blue lips,—and presently a hot tear trickled down her cheek and wet his own.

With the demands of the morrow, Saturday, facing her, she dared not make an engagement with him. They promised to meet on Sunday, have lunch together and another happy afternoon, perhaps the evening also. Their hands met again as they parted, and for the second time, she kissed him as the motor car stood in front of her hotel. Tony would drive him down to Charles Street and return to take her to the theatre. But as she stepped into the light and warmth of the foyer through the revolving door she remembered with a frown she had half promised Tom and John to go with them on Sunday afternoon to the Metropolitan Museum. Neither Tom nor she had ever been there, and John, reproaching them, had offered to be their guide. The plan had been discussed but nothing definitely settled.

Well, she would plead a headache—anything—and

get out of it. . . . Only, that would not be exactly fair to Tom. . . .

"Not exactly fair to Tom," her thoughts repeated as she reached her room, and "not exactly fair to Tom," she said again uncomfortably, as she seated herself before the simple dinner Miranda had ordered up for her.

"Oh, God!" she whispered on a sudden, dropping her face into her hands. Matters were becoming very complicated. She wished—she wished——

Well, fair or unfair to Tom, she could not, *would* not give up seeing Michael on Sunday. He needed her, it would mean so much to him! . . . One more day with him would make so little difference. . . . Tom wouldn't care. . . .

"Oh, God!" she whispered again, "what am I going to do?"

§ 8

There were violets on the table that had been spread upstairs in her small sitting room on Sunday. She had conferred with Demetri, the waiter, and the choicest luncheon they could plan from a close study of the day's menu, was to be served a little after one o'clock. Cocktails first, the kind Michael preferred, and a bottle of Sauterne, one of *Sirop de Citron,* and a syphon of seltzer. It was to be an Epicurean meal, and Miranda had gone the day before to a confectioner's for a half a dozen pastries, the real French kind. There was a tray or two of cigarettes conveniently arranged, and Zelda could not resist the temptation of leaving on her small desk where they would readily be discovered, a sheaf of her new photographs, stunning ones, recently taken.

The china clock registered the hour and the little bell struck its silvery note but there was no accompanying tingle of the telephone to announce that Mr. Kirk was

calling. Her eyes flew to the timepiece and fixed themselves on its white face, a sick fear clutching her. All at once, she knew he was not coming. No excuse, not even a word of warning this time! . . . He was not coming! He was not coming! . . .

Demetri appeared with a loaded tray and began to set the metal covered dishes and hot plates upon the table. She could not watch him. She went to the window and stood, her heart sinking, sinking, dying within her. The old Mechanics' Library in San Francisco rose before her; she saw herself sitting there at one of the long, oak reading tables, waiting, waiting, watching the big hand of the octagonal wall clock jerk its way minute by minute around the dial. Black memories came flooding back.

"Shall I shake the cocktails, Miss?" Demetri said deferentially at her elbow.

"No, let them wait. I'll take care of everything. My guest is late, you can go and I'll telephone when I want you to clear."

"Very well, Miss." She signed the check, tipped him and sent him away.

She was alone. A quarter of an hour, half an hour crept by. One of the covered dishes, beneath which blazed an alcohol lamp, began to sputter and to smell. She put out the flame, surveying, as she did so, the prettily arranged table, invitingly set for two. Suddenly, violently, she seized the vase of violets and flung flowers, water, glass, crashing to the floor.

"He isn't worth it! He isn't worth *anything!*" she cried, her voice breaking. "Unreliable—shiftless—good for nothing!"

§ 9

Dearest: I'm writing you because I feel so desperately the need of talking to you and of making a clean breast of everything that's been troubling me of late, and because too, I want

you to have a little time to think over what your reply will be before you make it.

You remember about two weeks ago, the down-at-heel, sorry-looking individual who was standing out in front of the theatre and whom you jumped out of the car to bring to me? His name is Michael Kirk. I introduced you, and I think you know who he is. At any rate I want to be certain you do. He is the boy I used to be in love with, the boy I used to know in San Francisco, on whose account my uncle wanted to send me to an institution. He is a man now, a poor unfortunate, who leads a hand-to-mouth existence as an artist. I was glad to see him again, too glad, I'm afraid, for my own peace of mind. I've met him twice since that night. The first time, he came to see me after the performance was over and we went to supper. He was hungry and I treated him to a good meal. We talked until neary two o'clock and then I drove him home. I asked him to lunch with me the next day and he accepted, but the following morning he telephoned and left word he couldn't come. Then several days went by and I didn't hear from him. I was worried because he looked sick and miserable. He had told me all about himself, how he had lived in Paris two or three years, how his mother had died over there, and how after that, he had come back to this country and has been trying to make a living drawing for the magazines. I don't know how good an artist he is, but that wouldn't make any difference; he's always been an aimless, drifting sort of person and I imagine he doesn't try very hard to succeed.

Last Friday when I hadn't heard from him, I went to see him. Tony drove me to his house and took a message up to his room. He came down pretty soon and we went to the Brevoort for lunch and afterwards drove in the Park. I left him at six o'clock and we agreed to lunch together here at my hotel on Sunday.

Yesterday, I rang you up and told you I couldn't go to the Museum with you because I had a headache. That was a lie. I didn't want to go because I wanted to lunch with Michael. I ordered a nice lunch, took a great deal of pains with it, but he didn't come nor send any word of explanation, and I confess it hit me pretty hard. I felt *horribly* about it. I haven't any idea why he didn't come. I've heard nothing from him since.

When he didn't keep his engagement, I thought I'd die. I don't know what was the matter with me. I started to ring you up; I thought I had to see you or lose my mind. This was about two o'clock. I got your hotel and then while I was waiting for the connection to your room, it came to me I *couldn't* talk to you, feeling the way I did about Michael. It didn't seem fair or right. I knew, too, I couldn't pretend that nothing was wrong. Then I thought of John and I decided I'd go and tell him everything, but while I was trying to think how I could get hold of him, it seemed to me I couldn't go through with that either. In his terrible tedious way, John would tell me I wasn't treating you rightly, and I knew that already.

I had a fearful experience then. I felt I'd go crazy if I kept on thinking. I was all alone. Miranda had the day off. I was shut up here in my room and there wasn't any way in which I could escape from myself. Oh, Tom, I don't know what was the matter with me. I was kind of sick, I guess. I hated myself. I thought I hated you. I hated my life and everything connected with it. I felt mean, bad. I wanted to do something reckless. I felt utterly unworthy of your respect, and friendship. I wasn't worth any man's . . .

I don't fully understand what my feelings for Michael have been or still are. I can't analyze them. I don't know whether they exist any more. Maybe it was only a flare-up of my old interest in him. I don't think it's that, but I know I "care." "Care" seems to me to be just the word to express how I feel about him. Is there a difference between "caring" and "loving"? I think there is. If I love Michael, it isn't the way I love you. I don't think it's love. But I owe it to you to tell you that my heart has been full of this old friend of mine ever since the night you fetched him to me from the lobby of the theatre.

It's all over now, however. He's proved he doesn't want nor need my affection or my friendship. I shall put him out of my life and out of my mind. I never want to see him or hear from him again. It's been a hard time for me, a sort of trial, but all through it I have felt conscious of your goodness and your sympathy. This chance meeting with Michael has brought one thing home very strongly to me: I realize as never before how much I value your friendship and confidence. I esteem

you, Tom. "Esteem" is an awkward word. It doesn't imply love. But I have had it clearly demonstrated to me these last few days *that love without esteem cannot endure and that the only thing that matters in this world is when they go hand in hand.*

Your devoted,

Zelda.

§ 10

Hesitating between sending this by Tony and trusting it to the mail, she chose the latter way. Tom would have it in the morning and a morning's thoughts to consider it.

She went to the theatre that evening feeling more tranquil in spirit and in better heart than for many days. During the afternoon she had rested, slept soundly, and Miranda had stood guard; no one was to disturb her, not even Mr. Harney. Easier for Zelda to have Tom read her letter before she saw him again. Should he telephone, Mr. Harney was to be told she was lying down, had had a bad night, would take dinner quietly in her room, and go to bed directly after the performance; if he proposed coming down to the theatre that evening, he was to be discouraged.

Zelda, wiping the last of the cold cream from her face after the final curtain, and thinking gratefully that nothing lay between her and bed, wondered, as a noise and a man's voice reached her from outside of her dressing room, whether the last part of her directions to Miranda had been understood. It sounded like Tom, but, oddly, there seemed to be some sort of an altercation going on.

"Well, Miss Marsh will see me all right," said the familiar voice.

Zelda turned a frowning, puzzled face to her maid. As she said, "See who it is," there came a loud knock. Miranda stepped to answer it, but as she opened the door, it was sharply and brusquely thrust wide. Zelda wheeled about, alarmed.

Framed in the aperture, his face stretched to a wide grin, his arms flung open for embrace, stood the large, expansive figure of George Selby.

"Well, Zelda kid, I got to hand it to you! You certainly put over a great show,—yes, siree, a great, big show. Mighty proud of you, old dear. Couldn't help telling a few of the people sitting near me that, by G-god, you were my wife. . . .

"Well, aren't you glad to see me?"

CHAPTER IX

§ 1

Her cotton wrapper caught about her breast, her hand to her untidy hair, her heart in her throat, Zelda allowed herself to be encompassed by his arms, her cheek, still moist from cold cream, vigorously kissed. She pushed the big man from her and at arm's length regarded him with frowning eyes.

"Well, aren't you glad to see me?" George repeated. "G-god, I've travelled eight thousand miles to see *you*."

He seated himself on the narrow rattan couch, shoved his hat on the back of his head, and clapped a hand on either knee.

"Yes siree," he exulted. "It's a great show. You had me going two or three times. I said to myself you were worth travelling eight thousand miles to see. . . . Well, how about it? Aren't you glad to see your old Georgy-porgy?"

Still she had not spoken. She gazed at him, fascinated. His face had become bloated, fine crooked veins wriggled over his cheeks, the whites of his eyes had grown blue and lumpy, the eyes themselves bulged, a trifle glassy. Drink, women,—dissipation of all sorts had left its mark upon him. She shuddered at the thought she had ever known him intimately.

"Where have you been all this time?" she asked coldly.

"Orient,—Philippines mostly. I went out there with Emerson Schuyler. He had Madeline West in tow, or rather she had him, for she had all the money. She wanted to star, you know. Emerson organized a stock

company, I played juvenile and often straight lead; we did India, Singapore, China, Japan, but when we came back to the Philippines, Schuyler and I had a run-in. I quit him, left him flat with nobody to take my place, and then, oh, just hung 'round for awhile. Picked up some money off the dear American army officers at poker and bridge and even took a flyer in business,—automatic sprinkler,—and got away with it. Oh, I had the entrée into all the clubs over there and did pretty good for a while. Then one day somebody told me you were playing on Broadway, but I didn't believe it until I ran across your picture in a magazine. Title underneath it gave you quite a boost. Well, I thought you'd struck it lucky,—one of those lucky hits, you know,—and I was mighty glad because I've always felt, Zel', old girl, that you had something coming to you. About six weeks ago, maybe it was two months, I heard you'd made another ten strike and were the talk of the town, and then, I says to myself, this is where I beat it back to the States and say hello to the old girl, so I made a play in a fan-tan game some Chinks were running down there, copped a stack of simoleons, and here I am. She'll find me a job in the same company with her or land me something good, I says to myself, or I don't know my Zelda. . . . Say, you certainly are climbing up in the world with your name in lights out front and an honest-to-God dinge for a maid!"

Zelda listened spellbound. When he paused to beam confidently at her, her chest rose on a sharp intake. The long, inevitable scene ahead of them appalled her. He knew, of course, nothing of her intention to divorce him. She would have to tell him, but not here; at her own hotel, presumably. Yet she neither cared to have him alone with her upstairs nor discuss their differences in the hotel lobby where his booming voice would reach all quarters. She considered rapidly. . . . Her own suite was the better place, and Miranda should stay with them!

As she turned to her mirror to complete her toilet, she explained her plan to take him to her hotel.

"Bully idea, kid," he approved enthusiastically. "Perhaps you and I can have a bite of supper together. . . . Any chance of a drink over at your place?"

He sat watching her, commenting freely on what she did, and his presence in the small room embarrassed her. When she was ready to step from her wrapper to her dress, she asked him to go outside. George roared and slapped his knee.

"Send your own husband out of the room while you change your clothes! Say, isn't that a hot one? I ask you. Travelled, by God, eight thousand miles to see my wife and she sends me out of the room when she wants to put on a dress! Say, old girl, you don't want to forget that you and I are married, you know,—man and wife still!"

He winked elaborately, then with a loud guffaw, heaved himself off the couch and put the door between them. In quick whispers, Zelda gave Miranda her instructions.

A few minutes later the three of them bundled into the waiting motor car.

"Goodness gracious!" George exclaimed, too deeply impressed for the usual profanity. "Limousine, chauffeur, everything!"

"I rent it by the month; it costs me very little," Zelda explained.

When they reached her sitting room, George again attempted to put his arms around her, but this time she definitely repulsed him.

"Say, what's the big idea?" he expostulated.

Rubbing his chin, he stalked about her small quarters.

"Very neat," he approved, "very, very neat."

He came upon the sheaf of photographs lying on her desk and examined them one by one.

"By G-god, you are a stunner, Zel' by G-god, I'm going to have two or three of these. Pity you've never

had a part that'd show the public what a beauty you are, Zel'. They've got a surprise and a treat in store for them. . . . Say, what's the chances of a drink,—and say,"—in a low tone,—"aren't you going to ditch the dinge?"

Miranda drowsed in a chair in the bedroom, but Zelda was careful to see that the connecting door remained open. It was past midnight and the service bar of the hotel was closed. She brought George half a bottle of whiskey which she happened to have in her closet. Mixing it in a tumbler with an equal amount of water, he drank it at tepid temperature without complaint.

"Yes, sir-ee," he said, glass and bottle in either hand, "I've been waiting a long time for this,—waiting for us two to get together. We were a pretty good team, Zel', and there isn't any use denying it. We had some pretty hard knocks and some pretty hard times on the S. & C. circuit but we had some mighty good times too. Say, I've often thought about those days, Zel', when we were playing three and four and five a day, and all of us used to crowd into somebody's dressing room, and Van, Toots and I used to rush the growler and bring in the eats. Gosh, how we used to laugh and chew the rag and smoke our heads off! I used to think we were treated pretty rotten then, but by G-god, I haven't had such good fun since. . . ."

"What happened to the dog?" Zelda interrupted him.

He frowned, puzzled.

"The dog! What dog? . . . Oh, you mean Buster! Ida got him. Ida Perkins was the girl I engaged to play your part in my sketch. Say, Zel', what happened to you? Where'd you go to? Say, I searched that town from one end to the other. Cassy told me you were going to help her over at the Alcazar, but you never showed up and nobody ever had a word from you. I hung 'round that old theatre from morning to midnight waiting for you to show up. I wanted to call it quits,

Zel', honest I did; I wanted to tell you I was willing to let bygones be bygones. Where'd you hide yourself?"

"I found a job."

"Doing what?"

"It doesn't make any difference now, does it? I took care of myself all right."

"Well, you see, I couldn't hang 'round and keep on looking for you on account of Morrison. We were slated to open in L. A. and I had to scurry to find somebody to take your place. Cohen dug me up this Ida Perkins, but she was no good,—crooked as a dog's hind leg. When we got to Colorado Springs I went on a bit of a toot, and she skipped out and took the cat and Buster and every cent I had, skinned me clean. Well, that finished me with Morrison. I was flat broke for a while, and then I got a job at a place called Dreamland Park in Wichita, an open-air theatre, and we did the old timers, 'Telephone Girl,' '1492,' 'Girl from Paris,' we even did the 'Mikado,' and say, what do you know! I made a hit in that old has-been, played 'Pooh-bah' and everybody was crazy about me. Say, I could've stuck there till kingdom come. Got to show you some of my notices. . . . Well, then Schuyler comes along and talks real money to me about this oriental trip. Sounds good, so I signed up, but oh, say, it was a dark day when I agreed to go along with that outfit!"

More of his history followed. He relished reciting it and Zelda trembled as she listened. What a fate she had escaped! Perhaps he would not have sunk so low if she had stayed by him, but she would have remained on his level: vaudeville, two and three a day, cheap hotels, cheap food, cheap associates! She compared him to Tom, and winced. George saw her face twitch and misinterpreted it.

"Breaks you up a bit, doesn't it, to see your old husband again? Well, by jiminy, it does me too. You know, I missed you like the devil after our bust-up in Frisco. I certainly was looney for a while. Ida used to

say I wasn't human. Well, I wanted my wife and I wanted her badly. And say, maybe you think I haven't thought about you a lot since! Travelled eight thousand miles to see you! Guess that ought to show you how I feel about you. And you, Zel',—ever think about me? Ever wish we hadn't split up the way we did?"

Setting bottle and tumbler down upon the mantel, he came to her chair, heavily getting down on one knee beside her. A strong whiff of his whiskey breath reached her before she pushed herself away.

"What's the matter, Zel'? Aren't you glad to see your old hubby again after all this time?"

She found her feet, and he too rose, following, pleading.

"Say, Zel', gee whillikens! it isn't often that a man an' wife are as congenial as you and I were. We used to do a lot of fooling and laughing together, and by golly, Zel', you used to be pretty nice to me; you took mighty good care of me that time I was sick up in Seattle, and that time I took the dope. You put me on my feet, you did, after that. I'll never forget it, and I don't think I ever gave you an idea how grateful I was for all you did for me. . . . Say, Zel', don't be mad at me any more. I was ready to let bygones be bygones out there in Frisco, can't you let 'em be bygones now? Let's forget about everything, and be friends again. Come on, let's. I used to love you a lot, Zel', and by golly, I love you just as much to-day. I've never stopped loving you, I guess. You always appealed to my better nature, Zel', you always brought out the best in me. Gee, Zel', I've gone down a bit in the world since we parted, and, by G-god, I never would have if you'd stuck. I know that now. Oh, Zel', I treated you rottenly, I did! Can't you forgive me? Can't you say 'All right, George, I'll forget all about it'? Can't you be nice to me again? You're on the top of the heap now. I haven't a thing to offer you except this bum old heart and that's always been yours anyway."

He caught her hand and tried to draw her to him. Wrenching herself free, she retreated; he seemed horrible to her. She put the table between them.

"You and I are done with each other forever, George."

"What you giving us!"

"I mean exactly what I say. You're going to leave this room directly and you're never going to try to speak to me again."

"Why, Zel', don't talk like that! I came all the way from Manila just to see you."

"I'm going to divorce you, George. I shall begin an action against you as soon as I am able."

"Divorce me!"

"Yes, I'm done with you and you with me, and from now on we go our separate ways."

He stared at her in amazement, his jaw dropped.

"Well, by—by G-god!" he ejaculated after a pause. "I travel eight thousand miles to say hello to my wife and she tells me she's going to divorce me! If that doesn't beat all hell! I ask you."

"Yes, George, it's the end for us, and after to-night I never want to see you again."

"Well, by G-god!"

"You can see my lawyer to-morrow if you want to. He's been trying to locate you."

"See *your* lawyer! Well, how about your seeing *mine*? Divorce me, are you? On what grounds?"

"Desertion, non-support, intemperance, cruelty,—anything you like."

"Not in this State!"

"No but it's going to be arranged."

Her coolness staggered him. He began to blink, his chin to tremble, and to Zelda's amazement, he sank upon the couch and, with eyes shielded by his hand, commenced to weep. Drawing out a handkerchief, he frankly wiped his eyes.

"I never thought you'd be so mean," he said brokenly, "I never thought you'd treat me so rotten."

She observed a bored silence.

"Here I—I come eight thousand miles, counting every mile and every hour and every minute that brings me nearer to you, thinking about my old Zel', all the time, looking forward to seeing her"—a gush of tears interrupted him—"and this—this is the package I get handed to me! . . . An' I was so proud, so proud of you to-night! I told the couple who sat next to me and a guy I met out in the lobby 'tween the acts, that you was —were my wife!" He wept again, blubbering into his handkerchief.

With fingers tapping the arm of her chair, she waited for him to collect himself. There was a cold, set expression about her mouth. She thought: "How long have I got to sit here? How long have I got to put up with him? How long will it be before he takes himself off?" She began to hold an imaginary telephone conversation with Tom; she'd ring him the first thing in the morning, and tell him who her late visitor had been . . . Tom would have her letter about Michael by that time. Was this going to complicate matters?

"I travel eight thousand miles and this is the package I get handed me," wept George into his handkerchief, shaking his head. "If that doesn't beat all hell!"

"Zel'," he said, lifting his lumpy, discolored eyes rimmed with water, appealingly to hers, "can't you have a little heart? Haven't you got a little milk of human kindness? You wouldn't spurn a dog the way you spurn me. I've spent every last cent I had in this world to get here; I had to sit up all night in a day coach from Chicago; and I had to bust my way into the Friars and shake a fellow down for a fiver to buy my ticket to see my own wife's show. All the way here, I keep saying to myself 'Zel' will be glad to see you, old boy; she won't turn you down; she'll have a little diggings of her own she'll welcome you to, she'll take

care of you like she always did, and she'll find a job for you, maybe in her own company, maybe in some other—something good—'cause she knows what you can do, she's seen you act; and you'll show her,' I says, 'how much you appreciate all her kindness and make her proud of you!' That's what I kept saying to myself a hundred times,—oh, a thousand times a day. And then I get here, and this is the handout you give me!"

"I'm sorry," she said indifferently.

"Well, Jesus Christ!" he roared suddenly getting to his feet, his hands clenched, his face flaming darkly. "Zat all you got to say? Just 'I'm sorry'? Nothing else?"

The abruptness of the change in him startled her; her heart leapt but not an eyelash flickered.

His fury left him as quickly as it had come.

"By G-god," he said brokenly, "I can't be mad at you. I—I . . ."

He passed a hand over his face, went shakily to the mantel, filled the tumbler half full of raw whiskey, drained it in three gulps and leaned his forehead on his palms. The room was still except for his short, sniffling breaths, and the ticking of the little china clock. Zelda glanced at it and saw, wearily, it was long past one.

"Listen, Zel'."

He came toward her and began to plead afresh.

"No," she said firmly.

Again he pressed his arguments, and when he paused, she answered as before:

"No."

He glowered at her then, and suddenly made a quick reach, catching her roughly by the wrist.

"Miranda!" Zelda called sharply.

"Yes'm."

There was a stir in the bedroom, and the maid came sleepily to the door. George loosened his hold.

"Mr. Selby is going now," Zelda said, striving to

control the tremble in her voice, "if he doesn't, you'd better telephone downstairs."

George swayed menacingly on his feet, scowling from underneath his heavy black brows.

"Damn you," he said thickly, "think you can throw me out, do you? Think you're done with me? . . . Well, you got another 'think' comin'."

He continued to glare sullenly at her.

"I'll find a way to get even, see if I don't. You mark my words, I'll get even. I—I come all the way to find you, all the way from Manila, and you kick me out. Won't have anything to do with me. You're on the top of the heap now and you can't give me a lift! When you was down-and-out, looking for a job, an' you didn't have room rent, an' you was downright hungry, who was it, I'd like to know, that gave you a hand-up? Ask yourself that, old girl. Where'd you be to-day if George Selby hadn't stood your friend then? . . ."

Like a large clumsy animal, he swung his head between the two women, eyeing one, then the other. Baffled, routed, he picked up hat and overcoat, but at the door he struck an attitude, the garment like a cloak thrown over one shoulder.

"George Selby," said he, "was never one to forget a friend or forgive an enemy."

Then throwing wide the door, he stalked out into the hotel corridor and was gone.

§ 2

"Tom—hello, Tom."

"Hello, is that you, dearest?"

"Tom, I want to see you right away."

"Well, I want to see *you*. I was just waiting until I thought it was all right to ring you. . . . Darling, that was a wonderful letter I received this morning."

"Oh, was it? Did you think so?"

"It was simply *mar*velous. Zelda, you'd made me very happy and very proud."

"I don't see why."

"Because you couldn't have written a letter like that to anybody you didn't like an awful lot. That's what makes me so happy. I understand about that chap. Oh, Zelda, I want to talk to you! I've been counting the minutes until I dared come down to see you."

"Listen, Tom, something else has happened since I wrote you."

"Something else?"

"Yes. . . . George has turned up."

"George?"

"Yes, George Selby—you know, my husband."

Silence for a long moment; then Tom quietly:

"Where did you see him?"

"He came to my dressing room last night."

"What did he say? What did he want?"

"You'd better come down and let me explain."

"I'll be there in ten minutes."

When he arrived, she told him all that had occurred. It was a relief to unburden herself, nor did she realize until she had done so, how greatly the unpleasant encounter of the night before had distressed her.

As she finished the account, her eyes filled, her lip shook, and in the very seat where George had indulged himself in his own maudlin grief, she wept hopelessly.

"Darling, darling," Tom cried, putting his arms about her, holding her close. She leaned upon him, cheek pressed hard against his rough coat. His embrace comforted her. Tom was strong and capable; Tom would stand her friend; Tom would know just what she must do, and how to do it, taking the weight of this new worry from her shoulders.

"You're such a dear," she cried with a quaver in her voice; "you make things so much easier. Last night was awful—*terrible.*"

He held her closer.

"It's a rotten shame that you should be annoyed

when you have such a heavy part to play. It must be simply *fright*ful to go through that after such a harrowing experience!"

"I'm all right now with you to tell me what next I ought to do—if anything."

"What did he want?"

"I told you. He expected me to be friends with him again, as if nothing had happened."

"Was he ugly—was he inclined to be disagreeable when you told him?"

"At the end, he said something about getting even with me."

"You don't know where he is staying?"

"No, I forgot to ask."

"Well, don't bother. The Judge will find out; he'll know what's best to do. You mustn't be bothered, upon that I insist. . . . That you should be exposed to a horrible scene like that and I not here to help you! If only I had the right to punch his head!"

She laughed at his fierceness. He looked so handsome when he was angry. She kissed him. Ah, there was nobody in the world as fine and dear as Tom!

Together they went to Judge Chesebrough's office and told their counsellor the news.

"Don't let this concern you," the lawyer advised. "We'll find out where he is, and I'll have a little talk with him. Maybe he'll be reasonable. We don't want any unpleasant publicity, we don't want him bothering you, we don't want him making any trouble about the divorce. He could be very ugly if he wanted to be. . . . You think he's pressed for money?" he asked Zelda.

"He spoke about having spent his last cent to get here."

"Let us hope then he'll be interested in an offer of —er—some compensation to—er—to soothe his lacerated feelings," the attorney said with a smile.

Zelda frowned. It seemed sordid to her, this buying

off one man to marry another. But Tom approved the scheme.

"Excellent! Don't you think he'd listen to something like that, Zelda?"

"Perhaps. I don't know."

"Well, find him, try him out, Judge. Get him in here and have a talk with him; see if he'll take five or ten thousand and clear out. I don't care what the figure is; make it worth his while to leave Miss Marsh alone."

"No," Zelda interrupted sharply, "I can finance my own freedom, if buying it seems to be the only way. You're very kind and generous, Tom, but I can't have you doing that. I have a little money,—a few thousand, —and if George wants it, he's welcome to it. Judge Chesebrough is *my* lawyer, remember; he may be yours too, about other matters, but in getting my divorce, he's mine."

"We understand all that, Miss Marsh," the Judge said reassuringly. "I'll find your husband, have a chat with him, see how he feels. I imagine we won't have any trouble. I think I'm fairly familiar with his type."

It was with the sense of a great lifting of the burden oppressing her, that Zelda left the lawyer's office. George was not to prove the menace she had feared; he was to be handled, satisfied, persuaded to leave her in peace. Light-heartedness came to her as the office door closed behind them. The stone paved corridor of the big building stretched before them, deserted. Zelda's gay laugh rang out; she flung her arms about Tom's neck and kissed him warmly. Then like alighting birds, they dropped to the street in the swift elevator, and laughing, chattering, joking, went merrily off to lunch.

§ 3

The Charles Street house was plunged in darkness, its windows black. Zelda pushed open the front door

and gazed uncertainly into the inky void. The cold breath of unheated walls met her.

Miranda stood beside her.

"Ah shure wouldn't like to see you go groping you' way in there, without a light, Mis' Marsh. Stairs are mighty steep and you don't know who all lives here."

Zelda took a step into the vestibule and hesitated. She had no thought of turning back. An usher at the theatre that evening had brought her a note left at the box office,—a cheap, soiled envelope, a sheet of paper torn from a pad, the letter itself written clumsily in pencil.

Dear Z—

I'm pretty sick. Can you come?

Michael.

"Ask Tony if he has a flashlight," Zelda directed. She stood holding open the door, while Miranda carried her message to the car.

"No ma'am," the chauffeur called in answer, "but there's a garage round the corner where I'm pretty sure I can get something like that."

The women seated themselves at the top of the three small cement steps while the motor car went off upon the errand. The night was still and tingling sharp, the street coldly bare and empty. Zelda huddled in her coat and drew its collar about her neck.

"You'd better come with us," she said to Tony, when he returned, "go first and light the stairs; we'll follow."

As Miranda had warned, the flights were short and steep, the house itself cramped and narrow. Doors, set diagonally at each landing, half faced one another. On one or two of these, the flash revealed cards and signs, curling and discolored, bearing tenants' names. As they thumped their way from floor to floor, their clattering feet sounded harsh and loud in Zelda's ears.

"It's the fourth, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes'm, think it is, nex' one up."

Miranda's voice was now an awed whisper; this prowling up black stairways was not to her liking.

At the top, a ladder, Zelda made out, led upward still, presumably to the roof.

"You remember which door?"

Miranda indicated the one at which she had left the letter on her previous visit.

Tony flashed the light on knob, keyhole, and over its blank face. At that moment, as if to guide them, a sharp, harsh fit of coughing reached their ears.

"Michael! Michael!" Zelda rapped smartly.

"Michael!" Her knuckles knocked again. Only the tearing cough answered her.

She tried the knob, the door opened on cold blackness.

"Michael?"

"Who's there?" His voice, but fogged with horseness.

"It's Zelda." Tony swept the cone of light about the room, and found the bed. They saw him then, raised upon an elbow, gray blankets covering him, his eyes shut to two tight slits against the torch's glare. His hair was tossed, his chin and cheeks dark with beard, a ragged undershirt half covered him. Again his cough seized him, and shook him as a terrier would a rat, then let him slump exhausted, back upon the bare mattress. Zelda stood riveted in the centre of the room, a hand pressed hard against her throat, her heart shocked to stillness. Her own helplessness smote her sharply. She knelt beside the bed, and found Michael's hand. Instantly he gripped it. His skin was burning, burning, and the room was bitter cold.

"Good—good of you, Zelda," he whispered. "Guess I'm pretty sick. There was nobody else. Too bad to trouble you." Cough—cough—cough.

Searching the room with his torch, Tony located a gas bracket, and now, while Miranda held the light, he used match after match in vain, to ignite it.

"Can't—can't," came hoarsely from the bed, "they've turned it off."

A short length of candle, coated with gray drippings, was found socketed in a dirty jam glass. Its wavering flame revealed the bleakness of the room, and cast vague, huge shadows on the walls.

Zelda rose and stood looking down upon the sick man, as he lay with shut eyes and open mouth, drawing short, rapid breaths. Another spasm seized him, bringing him to his elbow, tearing—tearing—tearing as if bent on tearing him in two.

"What to do?"

Michael in pain, suffering, perhaps dying! How, where to find a doctor at such a time of night?

"He can't stay here," Zelda said, from a depth of misery. Her hotel, her own small suite was the only refuge that occurred to her.

"Ah'd take him to a hospital, if Ah was you, Mis' Marsh," Miranda urged.

"Where? What hospital?"

Tony proposed the neighboring St. Ignatius'.

In the centre of the half-lit room they stood like black conspirators in a ghostly triangle, the torch throwing a white moon of light upon the cluttered, rugless floor, while from the bed came every half minute the rending, racking cough.

"He's going to die," Zelda whispered, strangling a sob.

"Ah just think he's got a mighty bad cold, Mis' Marsh, an' the place fo' him is in a hospital," repeated the practical Miranda.

"Oh, no, no, I tell you he's going to die!"

"Don't think I'm as bad as that, Zelda," came rationally though huskily from the bed; "guess maybe, a hospital's—where—I belong."

She was on her knees beside him once again, her arm encircling his head, her fingers seizing his feverish ones.

"Little Michael, little Michael, I'll take care of you, I won't leave you. I promise, I promise."

She sank her lips against the back of his hand, and turned her wet cheek lovingly upon it. A pressure from his hot fingers answered.

Presently on a long breath, she straightened herself.

"All right, Tony, see if you can get a doctor and an ambulance. We'll stay here until you come back."

The chauffeur groped his way downstairs, Zelda lighting his descent. Back in the forlorn room, she seated herself upon a corner of the tumbled bed, the torch glowing in her hand. A respite from his cough had come to Michael; he lay exhausted or asleep, his short, rapid breathing the only sound in the still, cold room. Zelda wrapped her coat more closely about her. In the half darkness she could just make out the rough, unshaven cheeks and chin, and the black sockets that held his eyes. One bare shoulder was fringed with the tattered remnants of an undershirt's torn sleeve.

Over the floor she moved the light from object to object. Cigarette stubs, torn and crumpled newspapers, a cup and plate dark with the remnants of coagulated food, sticks of charcoal ground under foot, a twisted tube of paint, stray articles of clothing,—a vest, a necktie, a sock—rubbish, odds and ends, one after the other came to view. There were three pieces of furniture beside the bed, a sagging, three-drawer bureau, a rough deal table, battered and daubed with ink, the chair Miranda occupied. Against the wall leaned clumsy stacks of cardboard, and on the table stood tattered piles of magazines, drawing implements, another jam glass holding a sheaf of brushes, the liquid it had once contained dried now to a dark ring of sediment. More trash and scattered leavings, evidence of squalor and neglect.

Cough—cough—cough! Up heaved the figure on the bed. Cough—cough—cough!

"Water!" gasped the strangling man.

They found it in an inner region he now indicated,—a place of further litter, of lumber and of smells, divided from the room by a flimsy curtain strung on string.

Cough—cough—cough!

The fearful racking tore at Zelda's ears and chest. Every bark that rent him was like a stab straight into her breast. She tried to hold him when a spasm forced him up, but touch of any kind at these sharp moments only added to his torment.

She had begun to fear she should have gone herself to the hospital when the gong of an ambulance sounded distantly. From the window she peered down into the street and presently made out the twin arc lights of two cars headed for the house. Noise, voices, reached her as they stopped below, and at once, commotion shook the building. Loud feet sounded on the stairs, doors opened, lights flashed, figures leaned from windows or peered into the hall. A doctor appeared, a young man, satchel in hand, smartly capped, brusque of manner, an incongruous brown overcoat covering his white uniform.

"What's the matter with the light? Can't we have some light here?"

"It's been turned off."

"Where's the patient?"

Cough—cough—cough. Ignoring explanations, he bent over the prostrate figure, hand on pulse, the gleaming ray of the flashlight in Zelda's hand illuminating the bed.

"Here, let's have that." He let it shine full into the sick man's face.

"Bad congestion," he pronounced, "that's all the matter. Who sent for us? This is no emergency."

"I did—I sent for you." There was authority in Zelda's voice. The young man peered at her in the uncertain gloom.

"I sent my chauffeur for a doctor and an ambulance. I'm Zelda Marsh. This man's a friend of mine."

The interne found his feet.

"He's burning up with fever and he's in misery with that wretched cough," she went on; "there's no one here to look after him. The room is freezing, there isn't even any gas. He'll die if he stays here. He must be removed to a hospital where he can have proper care. This is no ward case. I want him to have the best St. Ignatius' can provide. I'll pay for it. If you'll take him there in the ambulance I'll follow and make arrangements."

"Yes, ma'am, very good ma'am. We'll have him over there in a jiffy. All right, boys."

With expert hands, the attendants took charge of Michael, wrapped a blanket about him, lifted him like a dummy to the waiting stretcher, busied themselves with straps and buckles, then bore him away, down the sharply turning stairs, past open doors, where dishevelled figures grouped themselves staring silently as the procession went by. Zelda, Miranda followed. Even at that late hour a small crowd had collected around the open ambulance. The stretcher was deftly lifted in, swung into place, the young doctor sprang in beside it, the bearers scrambled to the driver's seat, the doors swung shut upon its dimly lit interior, but not before once more to Zelda's tortured ears there came the rasping, tearing sound of Michael's cough—cough—cough.

§ 4

The hospital was deserted, chemically odorous. Its smell brought back a thousand nauseating memories: Boylston, Boylston's office, the Emergency and the City and County hospitals in San Francisco, the horrible obstetrician, Ward 35! She shook these impatiently from her. Portraits of nuns, clerics, illumined texts gave

the reception hall and waiting room a religious atmosphere. The stillness impressed her; behind these orderly halls and parlors lay the great institution of the hospital, dedicated to the relief of pain and sickness.

A black robed nun came to meet her, putting heart into her at once with the repose and dignity of her fine, passive face. Zelda explained the object of her late visit, and as she described the poverty and the forlornness from which she had rescued Michael the hot prick of tears stung her eyes.

"He mustn't be put in a ward," she said, "I don't want him in a ward. Wards are terrible, horrible."

"Our wards are very comfortable, well regulated and pleasant," the nun said evenly.

"Oh, no, no, no! I couldn't bear to think of him in a ward! I'll pay—I'll pay whatever's necessary. He's very sick, and he's like a—a brother to me; we are old friends, I knew his mother. . . . He must have the best, the very best you have, a nurse, and the most experienced doctor."

"You have no physician of your own?"

"No, I know nobody."

"Doctor Lawrence Dwight is a very eminent man; he's on our regular staff."

"Is he here now?"

"Oh, no; he comes in the mornings. Your friend will have the very best of care until he sees him. There is nothing Doctor Dwight could do for him to-night that our resident physician and our nurses will not do for him."

"What time does Doctor Dwight get here?"

"About nine or ten o'clock; it depends on whether he is operating. If you wish me to do so, I will request that he sees your friend as soon as he arrives."

"By all means; thank you so much. I'll be here at that time too. You see, I must know what's the matter with him; he seems so sick to me. And you promise he shall have the best the hospital can give? I don't

know how long he's been in that awful room alone, and I don't think he's had enough to eat. He may be just hungry!" Her voice broke sharply.

"You need give yourself no concern. We'll take good care of him."

Zelda fumbled in her purse. The nun stopped her with a gesture.

"That won't be necessary—not now. If you'll give me the patient's name, his address, and who is responsible for him."

"Oh, I am."

"Yes, of course, and I have to know who you are, and how you can be reached."

Her name, which had brought the young interne promptly to his feet, meant nothing to the black robed figure here, who calmly made a note of it and the address of her hotel.

§ 5

But it had its effect on Doctor Dwight the next morning when he came seeking her in the prim parlors where she had been tediously waiting. A bespectacled, bald, bland man with a grave, judicious manner and fine intelligent eyes.

"You're the lady," he began, "who wanted to see me about the case that was brought in last night?"

A quick, appraising flash of his twinkling eyes, no more, when she made herself known to him, then he listened attentively as she described the conditions in which she had discovered Michael, what she knew of his life and manner of living, her long friendship with him and her present concern. Now and then the physician shot lightning glances at her through his glistening spectacles, encouraging her with murmuring comment.

"H-hum, I see, I see."

When she had finished, he frowned, pursing his lips.

"Well-l," he said on a long prolongation of the

vowel sound, "he has a bad congestion there, and I shall want to keep him under observation for a few days. We'll need some X-rays and his temperature watched."

"You don't think there is anything serious the matter with him?"

The physician shrugged.

"I'm not prepared to say. We have to observe these cases for a while." He smiled tolerantly.

The quick breath that escaped her was clearly impatient.

"My dear young lady," Doctor Dwight said with a touch of asperity; "I must have time to form an opinion. We try not to give snap judgments in my profession."

Confused by the rebuke, she said hurriedly:

"Yes, of course. I'm sorry. I'm worried about him, that's all. He's so forlorn and helpless."

"I understand,' he said kindly. "The young man's in a very run down condition. We'll give him a thorough going over and I'll let you know what I think as soon as I'm able."

"Thank you—thank you very much, Doctor. . . . May I see him?"

"Oh, certainly. You'll advise me how to get in touch with you?"

§ 6

She found Michael in a small, gray room, its one window looking out on a court. A Sister opened the door, and admitted her when Zelda mentioned Doctor Dwight's name. Michael lay upon the high hospital bed much as he had found him the night before upon his own; his closed eyes were deep in hollow pockets, his head flung back upon the flat pillow, he breathed with short, faint, panting breaths. His chin bristled with a sandy colored, unshaven beard, but now his hair was combed and a coarse, white hospital nightshirt covered

chest and arms. Zelda stood noiselesly at the foot of the bed, watching him with troubled eyes. He stirred, a guttural rumbling in his throat swelling immediately into the rasping cough—cough—cough that had beaten its way into her brain last night and had followed her in her sleep, when sleep finally had come. Cough—cough—cough. It roused him, reared him, his blinking eyes straining with the spasm that convulsed him. When the paroxysm passed he smiled, his face weakly wrinkling with his old, winning grin.

"Hello there," he whispered but the brief enunciation cost him another outburst.

She took his hot hand and smoothed it gently. He could do no more than smile up at her with tired, squinting eyes that drifted closed, opened, and fluttered shut again. He tapped his throat: talking made him cough. She understood. After all, she thought, what need was there for words between them? She touched his hair and gently brushed it from his forehead, his fevered hand still linked in hers.

CHAPTER X

§ 1

Snow began to fall from leaden skies by noon, and drifted thickly down for the rest of the day and all the ensuing night. Zelda wakened to the sound of scraping shovels and a world blanketed in white. The harsh, grim outlines of the city had been obliterated and smothered by its fair new dress. The window copings bore their hoary burden, and noises that reached her from the streets were small and echoless.

"It will be a white Christmas, after all," she thought.

Miranda, answering her call, came in bearing a vase filled with long-stemmed roses. Extravagant Tom again. Her rooms were rarely without his offerings. The flowers reminded her of the day's full program. Tom was to lunch with her, she had some Christmas shopping to do, and had agreed to tea with Mrs. Harney to meet some English friends who happened to be in the city over the holidays. And after the theatre she had madly promised Fishback, Henry's press agent, to appear at an Actor's Benefit,—a thing she loathed to do,—but Fishback had been so importunate about this particular occasion, she had said yes, and the posters bearing her name, among a score of others, were all over town.

No opportunity to pay Michael a visit, but she would telephone, talk to Sister Paula and send him her love.

Miranda brought in her breakfast tray, set it on a rack across her lap, her morning paper and mail beside it. When Zelda had witnessed Ned breakfasting thus, she had thought it the height of luxurious enjoyment, but now it was a daily occurrence and all the fun had

vanished. Her letters were some silly effusions from school girls, a bill she had already paid, communications soliciting her endorsement of a facial cream and a new style of corset, and two "begging" invitations. "The Sun" contained a glowing account of an opening at The New Theatre and with fulsome praise spoke of a new actress "destined to be a star of first magnitude." . . . Ashes, ashes—everything was ashes. Even her cigarette tasted bitterly.

The day developed as it had begun. Zelda realized she was tired; the thought of playing her long, exciting part oppressed her for the first time. She half entertained the notion of telephoning Henry's office to say that her understudy, Lena Hildebrandt, would have to go on for the evening's performance, but she did nothing about it, and found herself thinking distressfully of the irksome burden awaiting her while she lunched with Tom, while she hesitated between a choice of gifts for John, while she made a precarious and hampered progress through the snow from shop to shop along the Avenue, and while she listened bored, with wandering attention, to an English lady of title who hedged her into a corner during the tea hour, and told her in detail the story of a play she had written years ago.

Zelda escaped at six with the uncomfortable feeling that her hostess was rather discomfited by her early departure. But to be home and have a few minutes to herself, to take her time over her dinner, and go unhurriedly, composedly to the theatre seemed vitally necessary to her. On the way to her hotel the additional trial was added to her exacting day of Tony's car becoming stalled in a snowdrift, and as every vehicle for hire that trundled past seemed engaged, she was forced to make the rest of the journey on foot.

Thus it was that there was no Tony to take her to the theatre at seven-thirty. Miranda, by persistent telephoning, had succeeded in engaging a taxi, and as

Zelda, conscious that in spite of her efforts there was little time to spare, made a hurried exit from the hotel entrance and crossed the sidewalk to where the cab waited at the curb, a figure stepped out of the shadow, and interposed.

"Zel', can you wait a second, please?"

It was George, a detaining hand outstretched.

She drew up quickly, frowning with involuntary distaste. Big, burly, common, vulgarly attired. She shuddered. But this time his usual arrogance seemed lacking. There was a ring of supplication in his voice. Immediately she thought: "He's going to make a touch!"

"What is it that you want?" she asked coldly.

"I'd like to talk to you some time or other, if I could. I want to see you; I *have* to see you. I'm terribly sorry about the other night. . . ."

"It's imposible. We have nothing to say to each other."

"But lissen, Zel',—just give me a few minutes. There's something really important I've got to tell you. Lissen, Zel', I'm not going to bother you, Im not going to make a damn fool of myself again, but I travelled all the way from Manila to see you . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know all about that."

"Don't be hard on a fellow, Zel'. I know I made an ass of myself up in your rooms. I was a bit full when I got there and all that whiskey on top of what I had. . . . I'm damned sorry; truly I am. It isn't at all the way I hoped we'd get together. I know I acted like a fool, but—criminey!—I got to see you and explain."

"There isn't any use, George."

"Aw, lissen—you don't understand, you truly don't. I'm up against it. You're the last trick I got in the deck. I've been counting on you, Zel', to give me a hand-up. Straight goods, kid. I know I'm a down-and-outer, and I certainly have made a hash out of my life and the world would have been a damned sight better

off if I'd never been born. I know that. Nobody knows that better than I do. But, gee whillikens, Zel', isn't there any chance for me to pull myself up? I don't know. I ask you. I just want you to be friends with me, that's all. Swear to God, that's all, Zel'. You always made me want to be decent. I haven't been these last couple of years. I know that. I'm a boozer and a bum, but the only chance for me is for you to be friendly and sort of keep an eye on me. I'll show you I got good stuff in me yet, and I'll make good. You see if I won't."

"I'm sorry, George, it's out of the question."

"Oh, don't say that, Zelda, don't say it until I have a chance to explain more. Just give me fifteen minutes some time. You don't know how much it means to me, Zel', you don't know how I've counted on it. There isn't any sense in my going on unless you'll be friends with me."

"It's no use, I tell you."

"I can't go it alone."

"You'll have to find somebody beside me to go it with, then."

"Aw, don't be so mean, Zel'. Lissen, kid, before you say no, let me explain, won't you? Do that much for me, won't you?"

"George, I tell you there isn't any *use!*"

"Couldn't I see you for a couple of minutes after the theatre to-night?"

"No, I have to appear at an Actors' Benefit."

"How about after that?"

"Certainly not!"

"Well, to-morrow sometime?"

"No."

"Ah, gee, Zel', you don't know what you're doing!"

"George, you'll have to excuse me; I'm late for the theatre now."

"Zel', lissen, I love you—I swear to God I love you, and you used to love me. For the sake of the old—"

"It's nearly eight o'clock. I've *got* to go!"

"— for the sake of the old days, won't you let me see you? If you turn me down, I'm done for."

Dramatic—playing to the gallery—always pitying himself—always the ham actor! She did not believe a word he said!

"You'll have to go your way without me."

"Oh, don't throw me down! I travelled all the way from Manila believing —"

"I'm late, George, I have to go."

She pushed by him and entered the cab. To Miranda within, she whispered sharply:

"Shut the door."

"Lissen Zel', if you can't make it to-night or to-morrow won't you make it some other day—any day —a week, two weeks—any time—"

"Go ahead there," she called to the chauffeur, rapping on the glass in front. "I'm sorry, George, I'm truly sorry. You'll have to go your way without me." More peremptorily she called:

"Go on there, driver." The door shut.

Jerking, the wheels spinning in the snow, the cab lurched, skidded and bumped its way into the white rutted street.

Zelda sank back against the hard leather cushions, a hand covering her eyes.

"Oh . . . my . . . God!" she breathed wearily.

The burden of life was too much for her.

§ 2

By the following afternoon an appreciable impression had been made on the hummocks and drifts that choked the streets. The main thoroughfares were passable and everywhere janitors and their like, were scraping and chiselling at the pavements where the snow, tracked hard, had frozen during the night. But about St. Ignatius' the cleaning had been finished; the snow

was stacked in lumpy ramparts all along the sidewalks and Tony had no difficulty in drawing up next to the curb.

Carrying some of Tom's roses, Zelda went directly in and up the broad wooden staircase to the second floor, treading half on tiptoe along the wide hall to Michael's room. Cautiously she knocked. The nun answered, and immediately came out into the corridor, closing the door softly behind her. They spoke in hushed voices.

"How is he, Sister?"

"Better, I think. He's dozing just this minute."

"Did he have a good night?"

"I believe so; I had no report. The cough has loosened and he's much more easy."

"That's good. Perhaps I'd better not disturb him?"

"He's just dozing. I'm sure he wants to see you. Doctor Dwight was in this morning."

"What did he say?"

"He wants you to telephone him, or, if possible, go to his office."

"Do you know where his office is, Sister?"

"Well now, I don't; but you can find it in the book."

"He didn't say what time he wanted me to call?"

"During his office hours, I should say. Perhaps you had better telephone first."

"Very well, I'll do that. Perhaps I can stop there on my way up town."

From behind the closed door the familiar bark—bark—bark of the sick man reached them. The nun looked within, then entered, Zelda following.

Michael had been shaved; the clean jaw and chin emphasized the hollows of his cheeks, and deep-set eyes. But there was a new expression in his face that heartened Zelda enormously. He seemed more cheerful, more rested, less wan and woebegone. Possibly it was the flush of fever that warmed his sallow skin; unquestionably his cough was less devastating than it

had been. As his eyes encountered her, his face wrinkled, characteristically.

"How are you, Michael?"

"Pretty good. Lots better." He spoke in a whisper but happily, with a light in his eye. She looked at him closely, fancying she detected some new quality in his face—a sort of purification. Perhaps it was no more than his new personal cleanliness, the effect of being shaved, his sandy hair brushed, the coarse white hospital nightshirt,—perhaps the fever, like fire, had burnt something out of him. Thin, emaciated he was, but more like the boy she remembered.

"You've been awfully good to me, Zelda."

"My dear—I *had* to be. I'm very fond of you and you're about the oldest friend I have."

"I don't know what would have happened to me, if you hadn't come."

"You were in a pretty awful state, I'll admit."

"I was kinda off my head for a while, I think. I didn't know what to do for myself nor whom to send for. Only could think of you. The fellow on the same floor with me is a Polack,—one of the crazy artists, you know, who paints things upside down. He doesn't speak English, but he knew I was sick and I made him understand about taking my letter up to your theatre. I knew you'd come."

The long speech tired him. His eyelids drifted shut, but his hand clung to hers. She saw his stubby nails, the torn and ragged cuticle surrounding them. Those mutilated hands did more than hold her own; they held her heart. Careful not to disturb him, she took the nurse's seat, and so they remained for a long time, their fingers joined, his eyes closed, her gaze resting on his thin, worn features lined with many wrinkles, prematurely old.

The cough roused him.

"If I could be rid of this damn thing," he said, rapping his chest.

"You never should have let yourself get into such a run down condition. The idea of your living in a room without gas or heat!"

"Had a streak of bad luck lately, that's all; no work, couldn't make a touch."

"You could have touched me all right."

"Ah, well, sur-re—of course," he grinned.

"I'm going to pay you back for all this," he went on, his face dropping serious again, "just as soon as I'm up. You're doing much too much. I'm going to work the first of the year, a job's offered me,—advertising agency, art department."

"You're going to get your health back before you talk about getting any job!" she told him.

"I'll be all right in a couple of days. I could go home now, if I had to."

"You're going to stay right where you are until you shake off that cough."

He smiled at her dictatorial tone, and there was a slight pressure from his hand.

"You're a peach, Zelda," he said softly; "I like you to be bossy."

§ 3

"I've done all I can for him," she said to herself, bumping north in Tony's car on her way to the doctor's office; "he'll have to go his way without me."

The very words she had used to George!

Well, both of them would have to go their ways without her. She had no sympathy to waste on George, —braggart, boaster, buffoon, always putting his own comfort and his own pleasure before any one else's. There had been no ring of sincerity in his words last night; he loved pitying himself. He wanted to gain her favor just to further his own ends. How diligently or enthusiastically would he have sought her had he heard, upon his return from the Orient, she was helping Cassy at the Alcazar, or Madame Boulanger with

her house? . . . Michael was different, a victim of his own good nature, his own sweetness; everybody imposed on Michael; he was more sinned against than sinning.

But he too would have to go his way without her. She would have to put all thought of him out of her mind. She owed it to herself, to her profession, to Tom. She had criticized him for not taking care of himself; she might well follow her own advice; she couldn't go on playing "The Drudge" and at the same time make daily excursions to St. Ignatius'. It was four o'clock already and she was thoroughly tired. Michael would have to go back to his garret and shiftless way of living. If that job with the advertising agency was a real one, she could and must dismiss him from her mind.

"I'm just a big, hysterical fool," she said aloud.

The recollection of her agitation on the night she had found him in his cold, dark room came to her. He had caught a heavy chest cold, had been coughing rather raucously and persistently; there was nothing more to it than that, but she had made a great outcry, a fearful to-do, had sent for an ambulance and a doctor and had had him bundled off to a hospital! It shamed her now to think of it. She was too fond of him, that was the trouble. Besides, all this concern for him was unfair to Tom. She had made a clean breast of everything concerning Michael to him, and he had been extremely generous and understanding. It would not be any too pleasant to have to go to Tom again and explain this reawakened interest, these daily visits to the hospital. The thought of such a confession made her squirm uncomfortably. No, she must be done with this boy that belonged to the past, she must stop thinking about him, there must be a definite end to their relationship, and she must put him out of her life forever.

§ 4

Doctor Dwight rose, bowed, smiled at her from behind his glistening spectacles, and indicated a seat across the desk from him. Neatly fitting his finger tips together and gently swinging his swivel chair back and forth, he allowed a moment to pass before he spoke.

"Your young friend's condition is not so very good, I'm sorry to say, Miss Marsh," he said, shooting a quick glance at her.

"Yes?" she replied evenly.

"You understand, don't you?'

"I'm afraid I don't."

"His lungs——" he began and paused.

"You mean . . . ?"

"They're both affected. He's got t.b.—advanced case. It's a pity, for he's a fine young fellow,—very likeable."

Zelda steadily eyed the man before her for a moment or two.

"That means," she said slowly, "he will have to go away."

The physician nodded.

"Where, doctor?"

"Well, where it's hot and dry."

"Texas, Arizona?"

"Yes, either place, or the southern part of California, if you like. It doesn't make much difference. It's a shame when the man's so young. He hasn't any relatives? No place to go?"

"None that I know of."

"Has he any means?"

"Nothing; but I think I'd like to assume the—the expense."

"There are plenty of good sanitariums that are very modest in their charges, and where he'd be well looked after. I don't imagine it will be for long."

Zelda held the physician's eye.

"For long?" she repeated.

"Well, it's hard to say, Miss Marsh. In cases like this there is very little we can do. Rest, a dry, hot climate sometimes prolongs life beyond our expectations, but you understand that where tissue has been destroyed, medical science has not as yet discovered anyway to replace it. Mr. Kirk may live six months—"

"Six months!"

"— or six years. Much depends on rest and care and proper nourishment."

"Do I understand you, Doctor, to mean that Mr. Kirk is a dying man?"

"I did not say so, Miss Marsh. I said he might live for six months or six years."

"But not more?"

"Probably not. He may, of course; I've known such cases. What I mean to say is, your friend's not curable."

"I see. . . . I see . . . not curable."

"No, he's past that."

"And he can never live a normal, active life again."

"I'm afraid not."

"He can never go back to his work and draw or paint again.'

"Oh, he's an artist, is he? . . . No, I'm afraid not. He won't be able to make an effort of any kind."

"And if he stays here?"

"He will die."

"But if he goes to Arizona?"

"He may live a number of months or a number of years depending on how much care he takes of himself."

"He's never taken any care of himself in all his life."

"Then I should say he will not live very long."

"But life might be sustained for many years under proper conditions?"

"With proper nursing and diet, and above all else, rest."

A long pause, while Zelda drew one deep breath after another.

"Thank you, doctor. There are sanitariums, you say, where he can have all those things?"

"No doubt. Tucson's a dry, healthful place. I could find out the name of a good physician down there for you, if you like, and you could communicate with him. There are some very excellent sanitariums there, I'm sure, and in a—"

"He mustn't be put in a ward, doctor!"

"Well," the physician shrugged, "a private room, of course, would be more expensive."

"Money must not be a consideration. I have saved something; as long as I have anything he's welcome to it. I want him to have the best."

The physician acquiesced.

"How soon do you think he ought to be moved?"

"The sooner the better."

"You mean while he still has that cough and fever?"

"He must go to get rid of them."

"But he's in no condition to travel."

"Then he should be sent."

"You mean with a nurse?"

"With a nurse."

"I see. . . . Well, thank you, Doctor,—thank you very much. . . . Just one more thing,—you could make the arrangements about sending him for me as soon as we decide where he is to go?"

"I can, and will be glad to do so."

"And if he goes—goes to Arizona, to Tucson,—he will not come back?"

"He will not come back."

§ 5

She walked down the stone steps and along the snow-bordered path to the iron gate and to her waiting car, the physician's last words ringing in her ears like the clapping of a bell.

"I don't believe it!" she cried fiercely; "it can't be so!" But she knew it was.

Six months, or six years! There was a sentence!

Six months or six years waiting for death! And that was to be the end of the boy who had lived on Sacramento Street in San Francisco and whose mother had been Mrs. Kirk the music teacher, and whom she, Zelda, had once loved more dearly than anybody she had ever known!

The end! Drifting out of life in a consumptives' hospital in Arizona! Dying of shame and loneliness rather than of disease! The tragedy—the pitiful tragedy of it!

How cope with such a situation! She could pay the bills, but that was the least of it. She could not even go with him as far as his destination and see him comfortably established! The theatre, always the theatre, six nights a week and every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon! Never a recess, never a rest, never a chance even to catch her breath! . . . The price of success! How she had hungered and thirsted for it once! Now it was ashes in her mouth. She hated it! . . .

And there was Tom, faithful Tom, who before all the world came first, her friend, her champion, her "author," the man she'd promised to marry, and *wanted* to marry! It was hard now to conceive of a time when she had been indifferent to him, when she had ever thought of him otherwise than as the man soon to be her husband, with whom, hand in hand, she would find happiness and fame. A scheme of life without Tom was unthinkable to-day. He had grown to mean something even more than her future husband to her; with his mother and his uncle, he represented *family* to her, her own family. Never a day passed without a note or a message or a talk over the telephone with one or another of them. As near as any one she had ever known, Mrs. Harney was like a mother. . . ,

But to neither this kind, sympathetic friend, nor to her devoted son, could she carry the anguish that was crucifying her now, or tell them she wanted to leave the cast of "The Drudge" long enough to take this sweetheart of her girlhood away, and see him made comfortable!

Yet it occurred to her as she left the motor and entered her hotel, that while in all probability Mrs. Harney would not and possibly could not understand the reasons for her wanting to do such a thing, Tom would. Her mind was so full of him at the moment, that she was not surprised to see him rise from a lounge in the lobby where he had been waiting and come toward her. Looking at his strong, fine face as he approached, she suddenly felt with a wave of affection, that she could safely tell him everything, she could even ask him to help her arrange the details of Michael's transfer south.

Realizing she was frowning at him with the darkest of expressions, she smiled with sudden brightness. But there was no answering smile from him. He took her hand with marked gravity.

"You've heard?"

Eyes to his, wondering. A thought of Michael. But here was Judge Chesebrough's tall, dignified figure! He too looked solemn. . . . Something had happened!

"What is it?"

"You've had no news—heard nothing?"

"No—nothing. Tell me! Not your mother?"

"No, Mother's all right. Come." He put his arm through hers and led her to a corner, the Judge following.

"Zelda, we have some sad news for you, I'm afraid."

"Well, *tell* me, Tom!"

His hesitation flayed her.

"Your—your husband——"

"George!"

"Yes. He is . . . he has . . ."

At once she knew, and her hand flew up to stop him.

She felt the blood draining from her heart as if a plug in it had suddenly been removed. With lips and hands shut hard, she indicated for him to continue.

"The agency Judge Chesebrough engaged to find George, located his whereabouts yesterday. He had a room in a cheap theatrical hotel off Broadway. The Judge sent one of his associates to call on him this morning and to arrange for the Judge to see him. The hotel people tried to rouse him, and from one or two other indications, began to fear that something was wrong. So they broke in and found him. He'd shot himself, dearest, and death, of course, came instantly. Mr. Crum, the young attorney in the Judge's office who had gone up to have a talk with him, had his wits about him. He persuaded the hotel people not to report the death until Judge Chesebrough got there. He was anxious, of course, that your name should not be connected with the suicide in any way. When the representative from the Coroner's office arrived, he and the Judge went through George's effects,—weren't many of them, were they, Judge? They found a small heap of ashes where he'd burnt some papers, two pictures of you, cut from a newspaper and a magazine, pinned to the wall,—and this letter to you. The Coroner had to glance through it, you understand, Zelda, before he'd let the Judge have it, and it must be produced at the inquest, but the Judge was keen on keeping it out of the hands of any reporter. . . ."

Suddenly Zelda moaned and began to tremble. She covered her face with both her hands.

"I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it!"

George and Michael! Two blows so swiftly following one another! She felt the world cracking about her ears,—and then herself sobbing, sobbing, sobbing, Tom's arms about her, and heard Judge Chesebrough's voice:

"Get her upstairs, take her other arm, Tom."

They supported her to the elevator, and presently she was in her own room with Miranda pulling out the long pins from her hat, and Tom kneeling beside her, patting her hand, and the Judge standing stalwartly by.

She forced herself then to listen to the details of the suicide, told with reassuring interjections from both men, but occasionally she had to ask them to repeat. She heard their voices but often their words conveyed no meaning. All the time, she was thinking that they, in their own hearts, were glad, *glad* that George was dead,—that Miranda was *glad,* the whole world *glad!*

George dead!

The thought jumped at her over and over as if it reached her for the first time. *George dead!* . . . Why, she'd talked to him only last night! He'd come all the way from Manila—eight thousand miles—just to see her! *George dead!* . . . Why, less than a week ago he had been in this very room with her, had sat in that very chair! *George dead!* . . .

There came to her overwhelmingly the memory of the night she had waited in the room at the Emergency Hospital in San Francisco, the last time he had attempted to destroy himself! She had saved him then,—but now he was beyond her aid.

George dead! . . . Why, yesterday he had been alive, breathing, had come to her asking for the very help which would have stayed his hand!

"Go On There, Driver!"

Her words came flaming back in letters of fire.

Thus she had dismissed him! For all eternity these would be her last words to him!

With them ringing in his ears, he had returned to his rowdy hotel, had gone quietly and sorrowfully upstairs to his dark, ill-ventilated bedroom, alone, except for the company of his thoughts, and the memory of her curt dismissal. There with the door locked, with the loaded

revolver on the very table on which he wrote, he had penned the letter she held in her hand.

A cry—half scream, half sob—tore loose from her. The men sprang to her side, but she waved them back.

"Go—please,—leave me. I've got to be alone,—I must have a chance to——"

With terrific effort she mastered herself, and stopped them again.

"Wait just a minute," she said, swallowing painfully and forcing her voice to a lower key. "I don't want to be actressy nor to make a scene, but this is the second blow I've had this afternoon,—I'll tell you about the other some time, Tom,—and the two of them together have been—just a little bit more. . . . I don't think I can play to-night, Tom——"

"Certainly not, of course!"

"You'll telephone Henry's office and tell them to notify Miss Hildebrandt? She ought to have as much notice as possible. . . ."

"I'll do so at once. Don't let anything about the play or the theatre trouble you, sweetheart. I'll telephone Mr. Meserve and explain to him personally. Don't let anything worry you; you know how to get me and if you want me, I'll be here like the drop of a hat! Oh, dearest—sweetheart, I'm so sorry!"

"Thank you, Tom. You're always a darling. You've both been very good and—and I do appreciate all you've done and tried to spare me. . . . I'm really, truly grateful. . . . Wait, there's one thing more."

"Yes, dearest?"

"Where is he now?"

"You mean, George?"

"Yes."

"The Judge ordered him to be taken to Campbell's. He felt sure you'd want every respect shown and everything done that could be."

"That was kind of you, Judge. Do you think I might see him?"

"Surely. I'll tell them to expect you."

"And the interment, Judge?"

"That will all be arranged and I will see you are notified. I'll take it upon myself to let you know."

"Thank you—thank you again. You've both been very kind."

She gave her hand to the lawyer and her cheek to Tom's kiss.

§ 6

Her name was scrawled across the envelope, the flap was soiled and wrinkled where it had been licked and sealed. One edge of it had been neatly slit by the Coroner's pen knife. Inside were three pages of George's familiar, scribbled handwriting, blotted, rubbed and smeared.

Zel, old girl, this time it's a good-bye for good. I'm writing you for the last time, and I'm drunk as a fiddler's bitch! This time I'm going to kick-off sure. There isn't going to be no anti-climax like the time before!

I came all the way from Manila just to see you and you wouldn't have anything to do with me. Damned if I blame you. I'm no damn good and nobody knows that better than me myself. Me myself! Get that?

Last night I thought I'd do it and then I says maybe the old girl will give you one more chance. Ha! Damned if I blame you.

Say, this is going to save you a lot of trouble about getting that divorce! Ha!!!

Zel, I'm a bum. I had the D.Ts out in Manila. I don't want them again. This will make sure I won't. Don't let it worry you. Save you a lot of trouble,—save me a lot of trouble. I think it's a good idea myself. Got this gun off of Bill Blake, supply sergeant of an artillery outfit stationed at Penoog. I've been pretty near using it a couple of times already. Should have long ago. That time out in Saint Louie was the right time. They should have let me alone. Gas too uncertain; dope no good either. Gun best way. This time I'm going sure.

Well girl, I'm drinking your health.

Here's to you, your success, and a long life.

I haven't got any regrets, Zelda. Not one God damn one. Don't you have any.

You're a peach and I don't hold a single thing against you.

Last drink in the bottle, old kid. Drinking it to you standing up.

So long!

George.

CHAPTER XI

§ 1

It was two days before Christmas and there were green wreaths in Zelda's windows and a large pot of Breath-of-Heaven on the floor. By her desk was a small stack of white and colored boxes, a tray of ribbons, string and seals, where four days ago she had been fussing over Christmas gifts, wrapping them, writing cards. Glancing at them now, she thought, unconcernedly, they would never be sent. She rose from the chair in which she had been sitting, and walked to the window, her long flowing negligée trailing after her, and stood looking down at the slushy, ugly street, the pavement wet and glistening black, its edges brown and muddy from the melting snow. John Chapman, his large head in both his hands, groaned aloud.

"I can't, I can't!" he said miserably.

"You must," she told him.

"Oh, no, no, no; you don't know what you're asking me."

"Yes, I do, and you won't fail me. John, you've always been my friend, you've always stood by me when I've been in trouble. I'm in trouble now; the worst I've ever known. You'll help me."

"But I don't understand, Zelda, how—how you can do anything that gives so much pain to so many people. Besides that, you're—you're throwing away your career, your life."

"There's nothing else for me to do; you don't,—you won't understand."

"You could engage a nurse,—*two* nurses. There are a lot of people—"

He broke off suddenly, his face brightening with hope.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll do it for you, I'll go myself, all the way with him and I won't leave him until I can come back and tell you that everything is just as you would wish it."

Zelda sighed wearily.

"I've told you and told you," she said, "that I'm not doing this for Michael; I'm doing it for myself. . . . Oh, if he were only crippled, or if he had something like leprosy or smallpox, maybe you'd understand!" She wrung her hands. "I wish to God, I hated him,—I wish to God that the very sight of him filled me with loathing. I'd be so much happier. There'd be no questioning my motive then. I'm doing this thing to find myself and to try to make up for where I've failed.

"Don't you see I'm tearing out my heart by going!" she cried. "I'm giving up everything I love and hold dear in this world,—Tom, you, your sister, my profession, I'm even giving up Miranda!"

A whimper came from the bedroom. Zelda's eyes, under her knit brows, went unhappily toward the open door.

"Miranda loves me and I love her, and I'd like to take her with me. But I don't want a maid or a servant even if I could afford one. I've made her see that now; she understands. I've got to go down there and work, work with my hands. I have a few thousands saved up; six or seven, I think. They will last us for a while. What I have in mind is to rent or buy a small bungalow near the sanitarium or the doctor's residence, and I want to take care of him there as best I can. When the money's gone, I'm going out to work. I want desperately to work, I have a notion that work's the only thing that will save my reason and give me back my self-respect. My father was a cook, and I've always had the knack of it. I am sure I can make my living that way in some sort of a second rate hotel for instance."

She turned from the window and dropped wearily into a chair, staring for a long minute at the white ceiling above her.

"Oh, John, my dear friend, don't make it so hard for me. Henry Meserve was here last night arguing, arguing, until two o'clock this morning! I'm so tired. I made him see at last that I am right, that I am finished forever with the stage. My leaving 'The Drudge' may hurt the run of the play, it may not, but he is generous enough not to allow the possibility of financial loss to stand in the way of letting me do what I must. Lena Hildebrandt is a clever girl; I do not believe the play will suffer, but even if it were to close on January first because I had left it, I could not go on; it would be physically impossible. I made Henry understand that at last. My going hurts his heart, hurts his pocketbook, but he is big minded enough to let me do what I must. . . . You ought to be as generous, John."

"You're too agitated now to know what you're doing."

"No, that is not so. This decision is the result of other days and many years. In every relationship, I've had with men, I've been a failure; if I marry Tom, I shall fail again. . . .

"My husband came wanting me to help him. Oh, yes, I know," she interrupted herself to answer the expression in John's face, "he was intemperate and improvident and he was all that was contemptible and unworthy, but yesterday afternoon. . . ."

She stopped, closed her eyes, and a convulsion shook her.

"I went to see him at the undertaker's. They had laid him out in what they call the mortuary chapel, but he had not been placed in the—the casket yet, and he lay very white and very still and I saw in his calm, sleeping face the happy-go-lucky, buoyant, fun loving George I remembered. What he did to himself, how debauched he became has nothing to do with it, now; he wanted

me to help him. Oh, yes, he did, I know George. He needed me to help him pull himself together. . . . Well, I didn't. I shut the taxi door in his face, and then he went back to his hotel and killed himself. It's too late for me to help him now, but the other one who needs me is still here, and he needs me just as badly as George did. Michael may live for many years, he may know real happiness again if I go with him to Arizona and take care of him—

"John," she broke off to say vehemently, "the real reason I want to do this, isn't for him, it's for myself! I've got to get right with my soul. I can't go on being a Broadway actress, marry Tom Harney and pass from one great happiness to another, knowing for the rest of my days that my husband killed himself for the lack of a little kindness from me, and the boy who loves me and needs me, died a consumptive's death, hating himself and hating life, because I deserted him."

"But he may live just as long in a sanitarium," John expostulated.

"But I can't go on playing 'The Drudge' or any other play, knowing he's in one, and not in the little home I could be making for him! Can't you see that, John?"

"No. I can only see that you are ruining your career and breaking Tom's heart, and mine and Grace's because these two dreadful shocks coming right on top of one another have so upset and unnerved you, you don't know what you're about!"

She went to him and laid a hand gently upon his head.

"I'm sorry, John, I'm terribly sorry I cause so much pain and unhappiness, but this is what I know and what I can't make you see: if I stay here and do not do what I feel I ought to, the pain and unhappiness will be tenfold worse."

"But think about it! Consider it for a week, a few days even. You aren't sure you won't regret it!"

"Oh, yes, I am. In the first place, the sooner Michael goes south the better off he'll be. And secondly, I can't stand it here. I can't face Tom. No, it's easier for me, for him, for all of us for me to go to-morrow. I'm only taking a suitcase or two; Miranda'll get rid of a lot of this junk and express a trunk to me as soon as I know where I will be. You'll have to tell Tom after I'm gone."

"Zelda, Zelda, you ask too much. I can't do it!"

"You must stand my friend in this crisis of my life, John. There is nobody else."

"You don't know Tom! He'll follow you on the next train!"

"He won't know where I'm going, and you must not let him, even if he finds out. I know Tom a great deal better than you do, John. Tom will understand why I go, as you do not understand,—or won't! It will hurt him, it will be a blow to his hopes and plans, but he will understand—and—and s-sympathize with me. I dread to think of Mrs. Harney, that is all. Tom's future, his happiness are the only things in this world, she cares about. She lives for him and for nothing else. She will not easily forgive, I'm afraid."

"Grace will be kinder than you think; she loves you too. It's Tom for whom I tremble. . . . Zelda, think what you are doing to that boy!"

"Oh, John, don't you know I have?"

"He worships the ground you walk on, he idolizes you."

"I've learned to love him."

"And yet you are deliberately setting about to deal the most cruel of blows to the man you say you love!"

"It's because I want to go on loving him. If I don't do this, I'll hate myself and end in hating him."

"My God, Zelda, nobody'll believe that. You're going off with another man,—I don't care whether he's sick or not! You're going away with him, to keep house for him, an old lover of yours! Forgive me, dearest, for

saying these things to you, but you must realize how others are going to look at it!"

Her eyes shut fiercely and pain twisted her features.

"Yes, that is true, that is what everybody will think. Those I love best in the world will think it. I'm sorry. I cannot help it, neither can I alter my course. I go, relinquishing all thought of being Tom's wife, all thought of what he and I had planned our lives should be together, all thought of the stage.

"I want to cook, John. I want to go back to first principles. I want to be as I used to be when I was a girl running 'round my father's kitchen in Bakersfield. I want to get *right* with myself. And this is my one chance. John, I believe that as firmly as I believe in your affection. I must have had plenty of chances to get right with myself before, but I never saw them. *This one I do see.* If I don't take it—ah, well, if I don't take it, there is no use going on. . . ."

She was crying now.

"John, I'm leaving my heart behind me, but I'm gaining my soul. I want no more of New York, I want no more of the people I've learned to love, I want no more of the world. I want myself. Why should I care what people think of me? If Tom and you and your sister think I'm going down to Arizona to live and work for a man I prefer to Tom, then that must be part of my cross. You think this is easy for me? You think I'm after the fulfillment of some selfish purpose? Think it, then. But let me tell you, this is the hardest thing I've ever done in my life,—and it is breaking my heart. I may pity Michael, my heart may be full of sympathy for him,—and, oh yes, I may love him, if you will,—but no fool would say that being with him for the next few years and making them a little easier and happier than they otherwise might be, was going to compensate me for what I'm giving up! John, you understand that, don't you? You believe me, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, I believe you, Zelda, but you're asking me to make Tom believe it too. You—you, who feel so strongly about what you are going to do, and see why it is so necessary, can give your reasons as—as I never can. You ask me to go to him and tell him you've gone away and will never see him again! I—I can't do it, Zelda. I love that boy too much. Tell him yourself!"

"No, John, that's impossible. I can't face him and say good-bye. I'm human after all. I don't dare trust myself. I couldn't go through with what I have to do, if I allowed myself to see him again. This is my one chance, and so help me God, I am going to take it. You must tell him for me, John. . . . Ah, John, you'd give your life for me if I asked it. I'm asking for it, now!"

"You are asking for more than my life!"

"I can't help it, John; you've *got* to tell him for me."

"I cannot without giving him some hope to live on."

"What hope is there?"

"You're to be gone six months or six years; what after that?"

"Ah, well. . . ."

"It may be for only six months, sooner, for all you know."

"Yes . . . that is so, but the doctor said he might live six years and maybe longer."

"Six months, six years, even longer, I repeat, *what then?*"

"You mean after Michael——"

"After you've done what you think is your duty."

"Tom will have no further use for me, he will never want to see me again."

"But if he *does?*"

She shook her head.

"But if he does?" John insisted.

Her eyes sought his as she considered her reply, and

as John looked, he saw their color deepen. Her words, when in a whisper they found their way to her lips, were barely audible.

"Ah, well, then—tell him to come and find me."

THE END